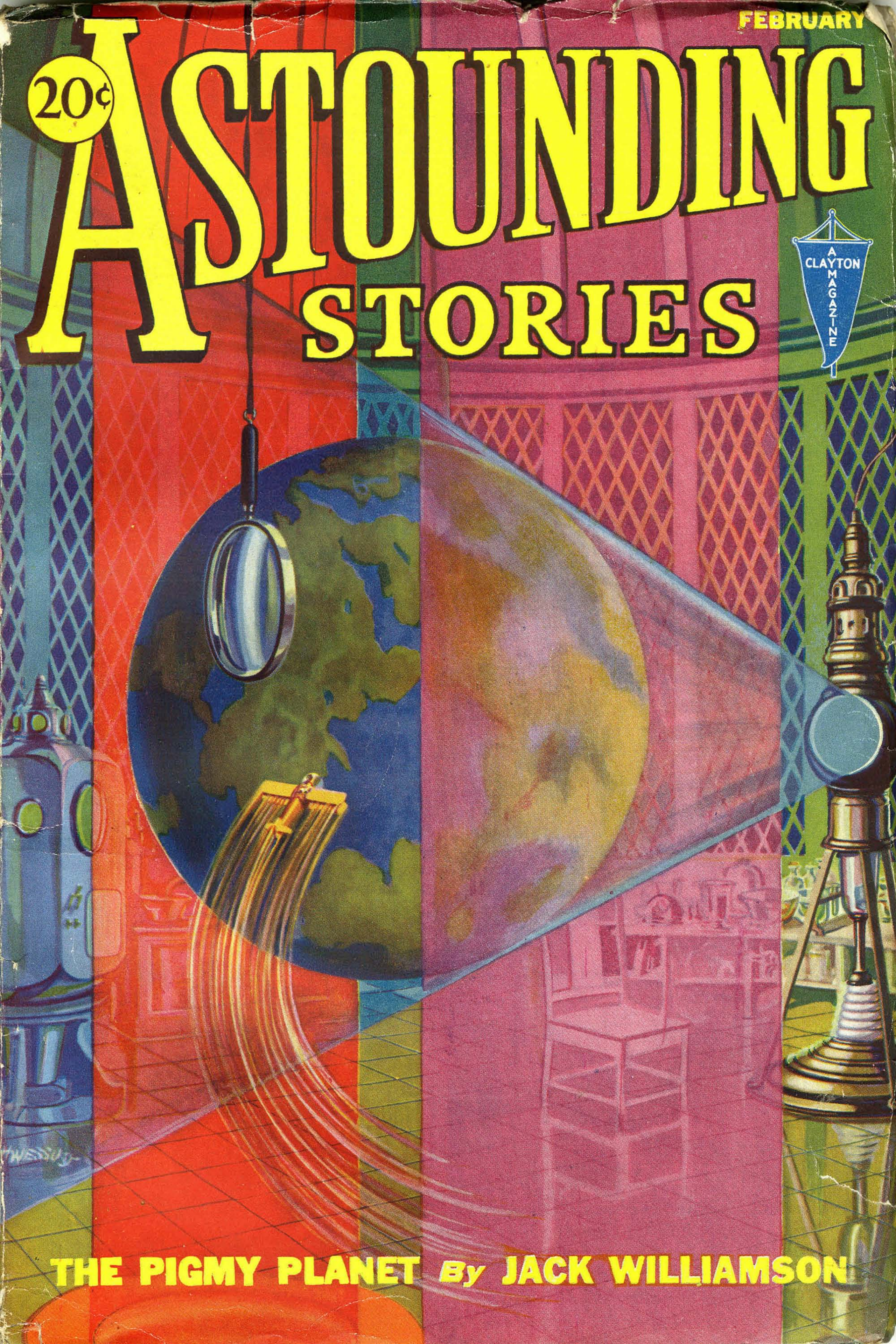
FEBRUARY

20¢

ASTOUNDING STORIES

A CLAYTON MAGAZINE



THE PIGMY PLANET *By* JACK WILLIAMSON

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NOTE: No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer!

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And with the big muscles and powerful, evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one other conditions that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

Here's All You Do!

Just jot down your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to me—and I'll send you, absolutely free, a copy of my new book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound, flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who won the title of **"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"** against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an **"Atlas Champion"** the same easy way.

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Charles Atlas As He Is Today. (Photo taken July 5, 1931.)

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-P,
133 East 23rd Street, New York City.

I want the proof that your system of Dynamic-Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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(Please print or write plainly)

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Gamble a 2c stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It tells you all about my special **Dynamic-Tension** method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundred of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 percent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.

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"Sure..I'll Tell You, Bill, How I Got this Government Job!"

"HAVEN'T seen you for a long time, Bill. I travel around quite a bit now — in this government job.

"How did I get it? Well, I'll tell you, Bill. Right after we got back from France I got a job in a factory. It didn't 'pan out.' They got some kind of new machinery and a lot of us were let out. *Boy*, I was worried!

"But Uncle Sam has certainly fixed everything okay now. I got $1,850 a year to start and I'm now earning $2,700.

I'm All Through Worrying Now!

"Until I got this Railway Mail Clerk job I was always worrying about money. Nowadays I never give a thought to lay-offs or slack times that have other fellows scared. Increases in pay come regularly when you're with the government. Everybody gets the same square deal.

"Every year, Bill, I get 15 days' vacation and 10 days' sick leave with full pay. Mighty few fellows who are not in the government service get a break like that. Best of all, Bill, you don't have to keep worrying about the future all the time, wondering whether some day you're going to be 'living on' your relatives and all that sort of thing. Your retirement pension takes care of you.

Then I Wrote for This FREE BOOKLET

"I suppose I'd be worrying myself sick right now, just as you are doing, if I hadn't happened to get hold of a booklet written by a fellow in Rochester named Arthur R. Patterson. Patterson was a Secretary Examiner of the Civil Service Commission for eight years. It was through the help he gave me that I got such a high rating and got my government job so quickly.

"If you are 'shaky' about your job and wondering what's going to happen to you, I suggest, Bill, that you write to Arthur R. Patterson in Rochester right now. I forget the name of the booklet he'll send you, but it's good sound stuff.

"Well, so long, Bill, we pull out of here in a couple of minutes and I have to get going."

* * * *

The title of the booklet which this Railway Mail Clerk refers to is "How to Secure a Government Position." If you are a citizen, 18 to 50, this booklet will tell you how to get the government job you want—and a lot of other interesting facts about jobs with the government.

Page 4, for example, tells what Uncle Sam pays. Page 10 tells all about the vacations. Page 12 explains how I prepare you quickly and how, if you don't get the job within a certain time after passing examinations, my help costs you nothing. Page 18 tells about the automatic system of giving you yearly raises.

There is no obligation of any kind in sending for this booklet. My only suggestion is that you get ready NOW for the next Railway Postal Clerk examination! So mail this coupon at once—and get going toward something that stops you from worrying about "hard times" and losing your job. Mail this coupon today. Address A. R. Patterson, *Civil Service Expert*, PATTERSON SCHOOL, 1082 Wisner Building, Rochester, N. Y.

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$1700 to $2100 a year
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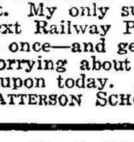
A. R. Patterson

FREE BOOK

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PATTERSON SCHOOL
1082 Wisner Building,
Rochester, New York.

Please send me your big free book and tell me how I can secure a position with the U. S. Government paying me $1,850 to $3,300 a year, with excellent chance for rapid advancement. This doesn't cost me a penny.

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The Clayton Standard on a Magazine Guarantees:

That the stories therein are clean, interesting, vivid, by leading writers of the day and purchased under conditions approved by the Authors' League of America;
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VOL. IX, No. 2 FEBRUARY, 1932

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN H. W. WESSO
Painted in Water-Colors from a Scene in "The Pygmy Planet."

THE PYGMY PLANET JACK WILLIAMSON 151
Down into the Infinitely Small Goes Larry on His Mission to the Pygmy Planet.

WANDL, THE INVADER RAY CUMMINGS 168
Once More Gregg, Anita, Snap and Venza Are United in High Peril—This Time in the Van of Earth's Defense Against the Interstellar Invader Wandl. (Beginning a Four-Part Novel, a Sequel to "Brigands of the Moon.")

SEED OF THE ARCTIC ICE H. G. WINTER 202
Killer Whales and Seal-Creatures Tangle Ken Torrance in an Amazing Adventure Under the Ice-Roofed Arctic Sea.

THE SPACE ROVER EDWIN K. SLOAT 222
Young Winford Heads a Desperate Escape from the Prison Mines of Mercury.

THE MIND MASTER ARTHUR J. BURKS 238
Lee and Ellen Brave the Horrors of Barter's Own Laboratory in a Rash Attempt to Crush the Omnipotent Scientist. (Conclusion.)

ZEHRU OF XOLLAR HAL K. WELLS 264
Three Earthlings Are Whisked on an Interdimensional Journey to the Den of the Scientist Zehru.

THE READERS' CORNER ALL OF US 279
A Meeting Place for Readers of ASTOUNDING STORIES.

Single Copies, 20 Cents Yearly Subscription, $2.00

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"COUGH, *you chump..* it's all your own fault"

Now millions prevent colds by twice-a-day L*isterine* G*argle* . . 66% *reduction shown in tests*

Now people are beginning to realize that if they have a cold they have only themselves to blame.

They are learning that ordinary colds can frequently be prevented . . . their number often reduced 50% and sometimes 66%. One cold a year instead of three.

Twice-a-day Gargle Does It

Wise eating, moderate exercise, ample rest are half the battle in warding off colds. The other half is the systematic twice-a-day gargle with Listerine, the safe antiseptic.

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204 persons in normal health were under medical observation for a period of one month to four and a half months. One-third of them did not gargle with Listerine. One-third gargled twice a day. One-third gargled five times a day.

Now, note these results:

Those who gargled with Listerine twice a day had from 50% to 66% fewer colds than those who did not gargle with Listerine.

Colds ¼ as Severe

When Listerine users did contract colds, they were one-fourth as severe and lasted only one-third as long as the colds contracted by those who did not use Listerine.

Those who gargled five times a day showed even greater resistance to infection.

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Only a mouth wash combining the factors of swift, germicidal effect and safe, healing action could accomplish such results. Physicians tell us that mouth washes so harsh they must be diluted before they dare be used, may, and often do, cause irritation through which germs usually enter the body. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Missouri.

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TALKING
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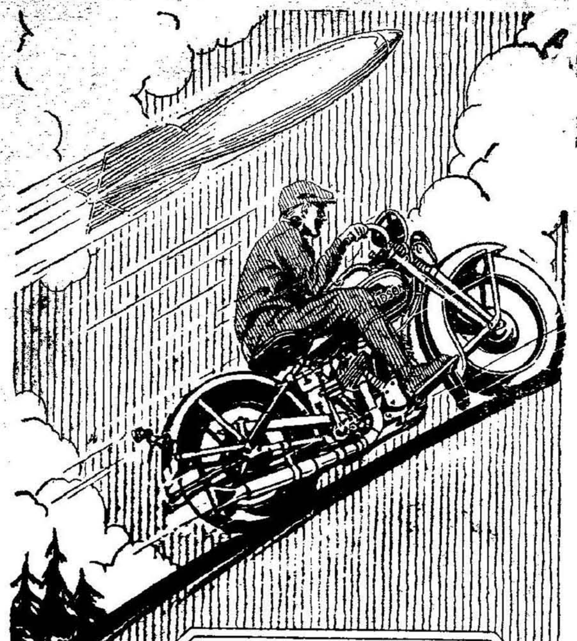

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Ride a
HARLEY-DAVIDSON

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My age is ( ) 16-19 years, ( ) 20-30 years, ( ) 31 years and up. ( ) under 16 years. Check your age group.

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GOVERNMENT CLERK
MAIL CARRIER
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$1260 to $3400 a Year
PICK YOUR JOB
Men, Boys—18 to 50

These are steady positions. Strikes, poor business conditions, or politics will not affect them. Government employees get their pay for twelve full months every year.

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Railway Postal Clerks get $1,900 the first year, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. $79.17 each pay day. Their pay is quickly increased, the maximum being $2,700 a year; $112.50 each pay day.

Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees, have a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs, they usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty and vacation their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business and see the country. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension. Many Spring examinations expected.

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Clerks and Carriers now commence at $1,700 a year and automatically increase $100 a year to $2,100 and $2,300. They also have 15 days' paid vacation. City residence is unnecessary.

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Salary $2,100 to $3,300. Men 21 to 45. Work connected with examining immigrants and merchandise entering the country from foreign ports.

Is Your Job Steady?

Compare these conditions with your present or your prospective condition, perhaps changing positions frequently, no chance in sight for PERMANENT employment; frequently out of a position and the year's average salary very low. DO YOU GET $1,900 EVERY YEAR? HAVE YOU ANY ASSURANCE THAT A FEW YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL GET $2,100 to $2,700 A YEAR?

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This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in your getting a government job.

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Rush to me entirely free of charge (1) a full description of the position checked below; (2) Free Copy of 32-page book, "How to Get a U. S. Government Job"; (3) A list of the U. S. Government Jobs now obtainable; (4) Tell me how to get a Government Job.

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☐ Inspector of Customs..........($2,100-$3,300)
☐ Prohibition Agent..........($2,300-$2,800)
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Name..........

Address..........

Use This Coupon Before You Mislay It

The
DESTROYER of
MALE HEALTH

FREE To Men Past 40

Amazing New Facts About The Misunderstood Subject of Rejuvenation

AN extraordinary new book, based on certain discoveries about old age reveals facts which, to many men, will be amazing. Did you know that two-thirds of all men past middle age are said to have a certain seldom-mentioned disorder? Do you know the frequent cause of this decline in health?

Common Old-Age Symptoms

Medical men know this condition as hypertrophy of the prostate gland. Science now reveals that this swollen gland—painless in itself—not only often cheats men of health, but also bears on the bladder and is often directly responsible for sciatica, back ache, pains in the legs and feet, frequent nightly rising, and dizziness, denoting high blood pressure. When allowed to run on it is frequently the cause of the dreaded disease cystitis, a very severe bladder inflammation.

65% Have This Gland Disorder

Prostate trouble is now reached immediately by a new kind of home treatment—a new, safe hygiene that goes directly to the gland itself, without drugs, medicines, massage, lessons, diet or the application of electricity. It is absolutely safe. 100,000 men have used it for restoring the prostate gland to normal functioning. The principle involved in this treatment is recommended by practically all the physicians in America. Amazing recoveries are made in seven days. Another grateful effect is usually the immediate disappearance of chronic constipation. Usually the entire body is toned up. Either you feel ten years younger in seven days or the treatment costs you nothing.

Send for FREE Book

If you have this gland trouble or if you have any of the symptoms mentioned above, you should not lose a day in writing for the scientist's free Book, "The Destroyer of Male Health." It will enable you to ask yourself certain frank questions that may reveal your true condition. Every man past 40 should make this test, as insidious prostate disorder often leads to surgery. This book is absolutely free, but mail coupon immediately, as the edition is limited. Address

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If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 303 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 48-D, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 48-D, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Can.

THE ELECTRO THERMAL CO.
4850 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio

Please send me Free, and without obligation, a copy of your booklet, "The Destroyer of Male Health." Mail in plain wrapper.

Name..

Address..

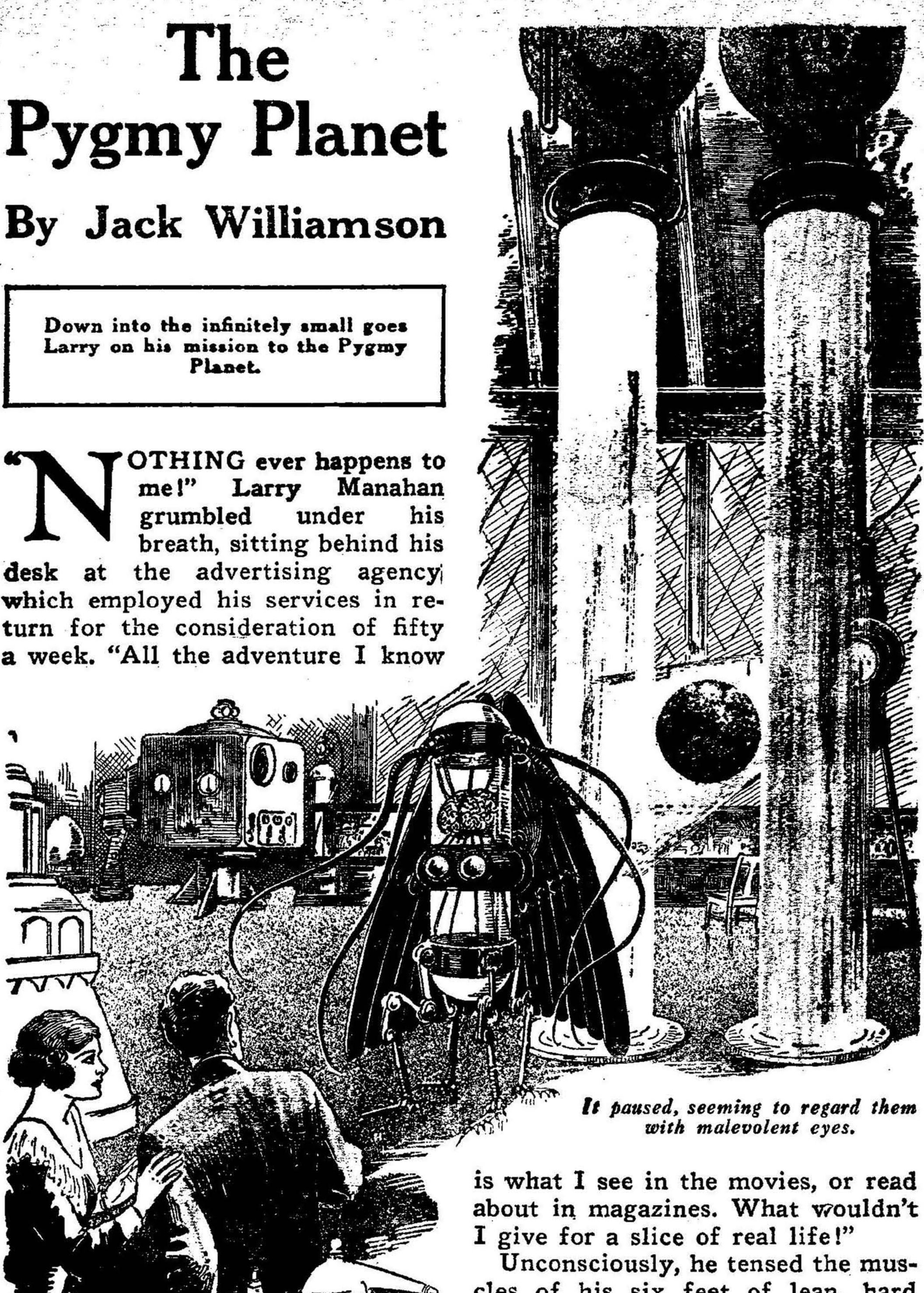
City.......................................State.....

The Pygmy Planet

By Jack Williamson

Down into the infinitely small goes Larry on his mission to the Pygmy Planet.

"NOTHING ever happens to me!" Larry Manahan grumbled under his breath, sitting behind his desk at the advertising agency which employed his services in return for the consideration of fifty a week. "All the adventure I know is what I see in the movies, or read about in magazines. What wouldn't I give for a slice of real life!"



It paused, seeming to regard them with malevolent eyes.

Unconsciously, he tensed the muscles of his six feet of lean, hard body. His crisp, flame-colored hair seemed to bristle; his blue eyes blazed. He clenched a brown hammer of a fist.

Larry felt himself an energetic, red-blooded square peg, badly afflicted with the urge for adventure, miserably wedged in a round hole. It is one of the misfortunes of our civilization that a young man who, for example, might have been an excellent pirate a couple of centuries ago, must be kept chained to a desk. And that seemed to be Larry's fate.

"Things happen to other people," he muttered. "Why couldn't an adventure come to me?"

He sat, staring wistfully at a picture of a majestic mountain landscape, soon to be used in the advertising of a railway company whose publicity was handled by his agency, when the jangle of the telephone roused him with a start.

"Oh, Larry—" came a breathless, quivering voice.

Then, with a click, the connection was broken.

The voice had been feminine and had carried a familiar ring. Larry tried to place it, as he listened at the receiver and attempted to get the broken connection restored.

"Your party hung up, and won't answer," the operator informed him.

He replaced the receiver on the hook, still seeking to follow the thin thread of memory given him by the familiar note in that eager excited voice. If only the girl had spoken a few more words!

THEN it came to him.

"Agnes Sterling!" he exclaimed aloud.

Agnes Sterling was a slender, elfish, dark-haired girl—lovely, he had thought her, on the occasions of their few brief meetings. Larry knew her as the secretary and laboratory assistant of Dr. Travis Whiting, a retired college professor known for his work on the structure of the atom. Larry had called at the home-laboratory of the savant, months before, to check certain statistics to be used for advertising purposes and had met the girl there. Only a few times since had he seen her.

Now she had called him in a voice that fairly trembled with excitement—and, he thought, dread! And she had been interrupted before she had time to give him any message.

For a few seconds Larry stared at the telephone. Then he rose abruptly to his feet, crammed his hat on his head, and started for the door.

"The way to find adventure is to go after it," he murmured. "And this is the invitation!"

It was not many minutes later that he sprang out of a taxi at the front of the building in which Dr. Travis Whiting made his home and maintained a private experimental laboratory. It was a two-story stucco house, rather out of date, set well back from the sidewalk, with a scrap of lawn and a few straggling shrubs before it. The door was closed, the windows curtained blankly. The place seemed deserted and forbidding.

Larry ran up the uneven brick walk to the door and rang the bell. Impatiently, he waited a few moments. No sound came from within. He felt something ominous, fateful, about the silent mystery that seemed to shroud the old house. For the first time, it occurred to him that Agnes might be in physical danger, as a result of some incautious experiment on the part of Dr. Whiting.

INSTINCTIVELY, his hand sought the door knob. To his surprise, the door was unlocked. It swung open before him. For a moment he stared, hesitating, into the dark hall revealed beyond. Then, driven by the thought that Agnes might be in danger, he advanced impulsively.

The several doors opening into the hall were closed. The one at the back, he knew, gave admittance to the laboratory. Impelled by some vague premonition, he hastened toward it down the long hall and threw it open.

As he stepped inside the room, his foot slipped on a spot of something red. Recovering his balance with difficulty, he peered about.

Bending down, Larry briefly examined the red spot on which he had slipped. It was a pool of fresh blood which had not yet darkened. Lying beside it, crimson-splashed, was a revolver. As he picked up the weapon, he cried out in astonishment.

Something had happened to the gun. The trigger guard was torn from it, and the cylinder crushed as if in some resistless grasp; the stock was twisted, and the barrel bent almost into a circle. The revolver had been crumpled by some terrific force—as a soft clay model of it might have been broken by the pressure of a man's hand.

"Crimson shades of Caesar!" he muttered, and dropped the crushed weapon to the floor again.

His eyes swept the silent laboratory.

It was a huge room, taking up all the rear part of the house, from the first floor to the roof. Gray daylight streamed through a skylight, twenty feet overhead. The ends of the vast room were cluttered with electrical and chemical apparatus; but Larry's eye was caught at once by a strange and complex device, which loomed across from him, in the center of the floor.

TWO pillars of intense light, a ray of crimson flame and another of deeply violet radiance, beat straight down from a complicated array of enormous, oddly shaped electron tubes, of mirrors and lenses and prisms, of coils and whirling disks, which reached almost to the roof. Upright, a yard in diameter and almost a yard apart, the strange columns of light were sharp-edged as two transparent cylinders filled with liquid light of ruby and of amethyst. Each ray poured down upon a circular platform of glass or polished crystal.

Hanging between those motionless cylinders of red and violet light was a strange-looking, greenish globe. A round ball, nearly a yard in diameter, hung between the rays, almost touching them. Its surface was oddly splotched with darker and lighter areas. It was spinning steadily, at a low rate of speed. Larry did not see what held it up; it seemed hanging free, several feet above the crystal platforms.

Reluctantly he withdrew his eyes from the mysterious sphere and looked about the room once more. No, the laboratory was vacant of human occupants. No one was hidden among the benches that were cluttered with beakers and test tubes and stills, or among the dynamos and transformers in the other end of the room.

A confusion of questions beat through Larry's brain.

What danger could be haunting this quiet laboratory? Was this the blood of Agnes Sterling or the scientist who employed her that was now clotting on the floor? What terrific force had crumpled up the revolver? What had become of Agnes and Dr. Whiting? And of whatever had attacked them? Had Agnes called him after the attack, or before?

DESPITE himself, his attention was drawn back to the little globe spinning so regularly, floating in the air between the pillars of red and violet flame. Floating alone, like a little world in space, without a visible support, it might be held up by magnetic attraction, he thought.

A tiny planet!

His mind quickened at the idea,

and he half forgot the weird mystery gathering about him. He stepped nearer the sphere. It *was* curiously like a miniature world. The irregular bluish areas would be seas; the green and the brown spaces land. In some parts, the surface appeared mistily obscured—perhaps, by masses of cloud.

Larry saw an odd-looking lamp, set perhaps ten feet behind the slowly spinning, floating ball, throwing upon it a bright ray of vividly blue light. Half the strange sphere was brilliantly illuminated by it; the rest was in comparative darkness. That blue lamp, it came to Larry, lit the sphere as the sun lights the earth.

"Nonsense!" he muttered. "It's impossible!"

Aroused by the seeming wonder of it, he was drawn nearer the ball. It spun rather slowly, Larry noted, and each rotation consumed several seconds. He could distinguish green patches that might be forests, and thin, silvery lines that looked like rivers, and broad, red-brown areas that must be deserts, and the broad blue stretches that suggested oceans.

"A toy world!" he cried. "A laboratory planet! What an experiment—"

Then his eyes, looking up, caught the glistening, polished lens of a powerful magnifying glass which hung by a black ribbon from a hook on one of the heavy steel beams which supported the huge mass of silently whirring apparatus.

EAGERLY, he unfastened the magnifier. Holding it before his eyes, he bent toward the strange sphere spinning steadily in the air.

"Suffering shades of Caesar!" he ejaculated.

Beneath the lens a world was racing. He could see masses of vividly green forest; vast expanses of bare, cracked, ocherous desert; wastes of smooth blue ocean.

Then he was gazing at—a city?

Larry could not be sure that he had seen correctly. It had slipped very swiftly beneath his lens. But he had a momentary impression of tiny, fantastic buildings, clustered in an elflike city.

A pygmy planet, spinning in the laboratory like a world in the gulf of space! What could it mean? Could it be connected with the strange call from Agnes, with the blood on the floor, with the strange and ominous silence that shrouded the deserted room?

"Oh, Larry!" a clear, familiar voice rang suddenly from the door. "You came!"

Startled, Larry leaped back from the tiny, whirling globe and turned to the door. A girl had come silently into the room. It was Agnes Sterling. Her dark hair was tangled. Her small face was flushed, and her brown eyes were wide with fear! In a white hand, which shook a little, she carried a small, gold-plated automatic pistol.

She ran nervously across the wide floor to Larry, with relief dawning in her eyes.

"I'm so glad you came!" she gasped, panting with excitement. "I started to call you on the phone, but then I was afraid it would kill you if you came! Please be careful! It may come back, any minute! You'd better go away! It just took Dr. Whiting!"

"Wait a minute," Larry put in. "Just one thing at a time. Let's get this straight. To begin with, what is it that might kill me, and that got the doctor?"

"It's terrible!" she gasped, trembling. "A monster! You must go away before it comes back!"

LARRY drew a tall stool from beside one of the crowded tables and placed it beside her.

"Don't get excited," he urged. "I'm sure everything will be all right. Just sit down, and tell me about it. The whole story. Just what is going on here, and what happened to Dr. Whiting."

He helped her upon the stool. She looked up at him gratefully, and began to speak in a rapid voice.

"You see that little planet? The monster came from that and carried the doctor back there. And I know it will soon be back for another victim—for sacrifice!"

She had pointed across the great room, toward the strange little globe which hung between the pillars of red and violet light.

"Please go slow!" Larry broke in. "You're too fast for me. Are you trying to tell me that that spinning ball is really a planet?"

Agnes seemed a little more composed, though she was still flushed and breathing rapidly. Her small hand still gripped the bright automatic.

"Yes, it is a planet. The Pygmy Planet, Dr. Whiting called it. He said it was the great experiment of the century. You see, he was testing evolution. We began with the planet, young and hot, and watched it until it is now almost as old as Mars. We watched the change and development of life upon it. And the rise and decay of a strange civilization. Until now its people are strange things, with human brains in mechanical bodies, worshiping a rusty machine like a god—"

"Go slow!" Larry pleaded again. "I don't see— Did the doctor build —create—that planet himself?"

"Yes. It began with his work on atomic structure. He discovered that certain frequencies of the X-ray—so powerful that they are almost akin to the cosmic ray—have the power of altering electronic orbits. Every atom, you know, is a sort of solar system, with electrons revolving about a proton.

"And these rays would cause the electrons to fall into incredibly smaller orbits, causing vast reduction in the size of the atoms, and in the size of any object which the atoms formed. They would cause anything, living or dead, to shrink to inconceivably microscopic dimensions—or restore it to its former size, depending upon the exact wave-length used.

"And time passes far more swiftly for the tiny objects—probably because the electrons move faster in their smaller orbits. That is what suggested to Dr. Whiting that he would be able to watch the entire life of a planet, in the laboratory. And so, at first, we experimented merely with solitary specimens or colonies of animals.

"But on the Pygmy Planet, we have watched the life of a world—the whole panorama of evolution—"

"IT seems too wonderful!" Larry muttered. "Could Dr. Whiting actually decrease his size and become a dwarf?"

"No trick at all," Agnes assured him. "All you have to do is stand in the violet beam, to shrink. And move over in the red one, when you want to grow. I have been several times with Dr. Whiting to the Pygmy Planet."

"Been—" Larry stopped, breathless with astonishment.

"See the little airplane," Agnes said, pointing under the table.

Larry gasped.

Beneath the table stood a toy airplane. The spread of its glistening, perfect wings was hardly three feet. A wonderful, delicate toy, accurate in every detail of propeller, motor and landing gear, of brace and rudder and aileron. Then he realized that it was no toy at all, but a faithful miniature of a commercial plane. A complete, tiny copy of one of the latest single-motor, cabin monoplane models.

"It looks like it would fly," he

said "a friend of mine has a big one, just like it! Taught me to fly it, last summer vacation. This is the very image of it!"

"It will fly!" Agnes assured him, now composed enough to smile at his amazement. "I have been with the doctor to the Pygmy Planet in it.

"You stand in the violet ray until you're about three inches high," she explained, "and then get into the plane. Then you fly up and into the violet ray at the point where it touches the planet, and remain there while you grow smaller. When you are the right size, all you have to do is drop to the surface, and land. To come away, you rise into the red ray and stay in it till you grow to proper size, when you come down and land."

"You—you've actually done that?" he gasped. "It sounds like a fairy story!"

"YES, I've done it," she assured him. Then she shuddered apprehensively. "And the things—the machine-monsters, Dr. Whiting called them—have learned to do it, too. One of them came down the red ray, and attacked him. The doctor had a gun—but what could he do against one of those?" She shivered.

"It carried him back up the violet beam. Just a few minutes ago, I started to phone you. Then I was afraid you would be hurt—"

"Me, hurt?" Larry burst out. "What about you, here alone?"

"It was my business. Dr. Whiting told me there might be danger, when he hired me."

"And now, what can we do?" Larry demanded.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I'm afraid one of the monsters will be back after a new victim. We could smash the apparatus, but it is too wonderful to be destroyed. And besides, Dr. Whiting may have escaped. He may be alive there, in the deserts!"

"We might fly up, in the little plane," Larry proposed, doubtfully. "I think I could pilot it. If you want—"

The girl's body stiffened. Her brown eyes widened with sudden dread, and her small face went pale. She slipped quickly from the stool, drawing in her breath with a sort of gasp. The hand that gripped the automatic trembled a little.

"What's the matter?" Larry cried.

"I thought—" she gasped, "I think I see something in the ray! The machine-monster is coming back!"

Her lips tightened. She lifted the little automatic and began to shoot into the pillar of crimson fire beside the tiny, spinning globe.

Larry, watching tensely, saw a curious, bird-like something fluttering about in the red ray, *swiftly growing larger!*

Deliberately, and pausing to aim carefully for each shot, the girl emptied the little gun at the figure. Her body was rigid, her small face was firmly set, though she was breathing very fast.

A CURIOUS numbness had come over Larry. His only physical sensations were the quick hammering of his heart, and a parching dryness in his throat. Terror stiffened him. Though he would not have admitted it, he was paralyzed with fear.

The glittering thing that fluttered about in the crimson ray was not an easy target. When the gun was empty, it seemed still unharmed. And its wings had increased to a span of a foot.

"Too late!" Agnes gasped. "Why didn't we do *something?*"

Trembling, horror-stricken, she shrank toward Larry.

He was staring at the thing in the pillar of scarlet light.

It had dropped to the crystal disk upon which the red ray fell from the huge, glowing tube above.

It stood there, motionless except for the swift increase of its size.

Larry gazed at it, lost in fear and wonder. It was like nothing he had ever seen. What was it that Agnes had said, of machine-monsters, of human brains in mechanical bodies? His brain reeled. He strained his eyes to distinguish the monstrosity more clearly. It was veiled in crimson flame; he could not see it distinctly.

But suddenly, when it was as tall as himself, it sprang out into the room, toward Larry and the shuddering girl. Just off the crystal disk, beyond the scarlet pillar of fire, it paused for long seconds, seeming to regard them with malevolent eyes.

For the first time, Larry could see it plainly.

Its body, or its central part, was a tube of transparent crystal; an upright cylinder, rounded at upper and lower ends. It was nearly a foot in diameter, and four feet long. It seemed filled with a luminous, purple liquid.

About the cylinder were three bands of greenish, glistening metal. Attached to the lower band were four jointed legs of the same bright green metal, upon which the strange thing stood.

Set in the middle band were two glittering, polished lenses, which seemed to serve as eyes, and Larry felt that they were gazing at him with malevolent menace. Behind the eyes, two wings sprang from the green band. Ingenious, folding wings, of thin plates and bars of green metal.

And from the upper band sprang four slender, glistening, whip-like tentacles, metallic and brilliantly green, two yards in length. They writhed with strange life!

IT seemed a long time to Larry that the thing stood, motionless, seeming to stare evilly at them with eye-like lenses. Then, lurching forward a little, it moved toward them upon legs of green metal. And now Larry saw another amazing thing about it.

Floating in the brilliant violet liquid that filled the crystal tube was a gray mass, wrinkled and corrugated. This was divided by deep clefts into right and left hemispheres, which, in turn were separated into larger upper and smaller lower segments. White filaments ran through the violet liquid from its base toward the three rings or bands of green metal that encircled the cylinder.

In an instant, Larry realized that the gray mass was a human brain. The larger, upper part the cerebrum, the smaller mass at the back the cerebellum. And the white filaments were nerves, by means of which this brain controlled its astounding, mechanical body!

A brain in a machine!

The violet liquid, it came to Larry in his trance of wonder, must take the place of blood, feeding the brain-cells, absorbing waste.

An eternal mind, within a machine! Free from the ills and weaknesses of the body. And devoid, too, of any pity, of any tender feelings. A cold and selfish mind, without emotion—unless it might worship itself or its mechanical body.

It was this monster that had spilt the pool of blood drying on the floor, near the door. And it was these glistening, green, snake-like tentacles that had crumpled the revolver into a broken mass of steel!

Abruptly the machine-monster darted forward, running swiftly upon its four legs of green metal. Slender tentacles reached out toward the shuddering girl at Larry's shoulder.

"Run!" Agnes gasped to him, quickly. "It will kill you!"

The girl tried to push him back.

As she touched him, Larry recovered from his daze of wondering fear. Agnes was in frightful danger, and facing it with quiet courage. He must find a weapon!

WILDLY, he looked about him. His eyes fell upon the tall, heavy wooden stool, upon which Agnes had been sitting.

"Get back!" he shouted to her.

He snatched up the stool, and, swinging it over his head, sprang toward the machine of violet-filled crystal and glittering green metal.

"Stop!" Agnes screamed, in a terrified voice. "You can't—"

She had run before him. He seized her arm and swung her back behind him. Then he advanced warily toward the machine-monster, which had paused and seemed to be regarding him with sinister intentness, through its glistening crystal eye-lenses.

With all his strength, Larry struck at the crystal cylinder, swinging the stool like an ax. A slender, metallic green tentacle whipped out, tore the stool from his hands, and sent it crashing across the room, to splinter into fragments on the opposite wall.

Larry, sent off his balance, staggered toward the glittering machine. As he stumbled against the transparent tube that contained the brain, he clenched his fist to strike futilely at it.

A snake-like metal tentacle wrapped itself about him; he was hurled to the floor, to sprawl grotesquely among broken apparatus.

His head came against the leg of a bench. For a few moments he was dazed. But it seemed only a few seconds to him before he had staggered to his feet, rubbing his bruised head. Anxiously, he peered about the room.

The machine-monster and Agnes were gone!

He stumbled back to the mass of apparatus in the center of the huge laboratory. Intently, he gazed into the upright pillar of crimson flame. Nothing was visible there.

"No, the other!" he gasped. "The violet is the way they went."

HE turned to the companion ray of violet radiance that beat straight down on the opposite side of the tiny, whirling planet. And in that motionless torrent of chill violet flame he saw them.

Tiny, already, and swiftly dwindling!

With green wings outspread, the machine-monster was beating swiftly upward through the pillar of purple-blue flame. And close against the crystal tube that contained its brain, was Agnes, held fast by the whip-like tentacles of glistening green metal.

Larry moved to spring after them, into the torrent of violet light. But sudden caution restrained him.

"I'd shrink, too!" he muttered. "And then where would I be? I'd be standing on the glass platform, I guess. And the thing flying off over my head!"

He gazed at the rapidly dwindling forms of Agnes Sterling and her amazing abductor. As it grew smaller, the machine-monster flew higher in the violet beam, until it was opposite the tiny, spinning planet.

The distance between the red and the violet rays was just slightly more than the diameter of the pygmy world. The sphere hung between them, one side of it a fraction of an inch from the red, the other as near the violet.

Opposite the elfin planet, the monster ceased to climb. It hung there in the violet ray, an inch from the surface of the little world.

And still it swiftly dwindled. It was no larger than a fly, and Larry could barely distinguish the form of the girl, helpless in the green tentacles.

Soon she and the monster became a mere greenish speck. . . . Suddenly they were gone.

FOR a little time he stood watching the point where they had vanished, watching the red and the violet rays that poured straight down upon the crystal disks, watching the tiny, green-blue planet spinning so steadily between the bright rays.

Abruptly, he recovered from his fascination of wonder.

"What did she say?" he muttered. "Something about the monsters carrying off people to sacrifice to a rusty machine that they worship as a god! It took her—for that!"

He clenched his fists; his lips became a straight line of determination.

"Then I guess we try a voyage in the little plane. A slim chance, maybe. But decidedly better than none!"

He returned to the table, dropped on his knees, inspected the tiny airplane. A perfect miniature, delicately beautiful; its slim, small wings were bright as silver foil. Carefully, he opened the door and peered into the diminutive cabin. Two minute rifles, several Lilliputian pistols, and boxes of ammunition to match, lay on the rear seat of the plane.

"So we are prepared for war," he remarked, grinning in satisfaction. "And the next trick, I suppose, is to get shrunk to fit the plane. About three inches, she said. Lord, it's a queer thing to think about!"

He got to his feet, walked back to the machine in the center of the room, with its twin pillars of red and violet flame, and the tiny world floating between them. He started to step into the violet ray, then hesitated, shivering involuntarily, like a swimmer about to dive into icy cold water.

Turning back to one of the benches, he picked up a wooden funnel-rack, and tossed it to the crystal disk beneath the violet ray. Slowly it decreased in size, until it had vanished from sight.

"Safe, I suppose," he muttered. "But how do I know when I'm small enough?"

AFTER a moment he picked up a glass bottle which measured about three inches in height, set it on the floor, beside the crystal disk.

"I dive out when I get to be the size of the bottle," he murmured.

With that, he leaped into the violet beam.

He felt no unusual sensation, except one of pleasant, tingling warmth, as if the direct rays of the sun were beating down upon him. For a moment he feared that his size was not being affected. Then he noticed, not that he appeared to become smaller, but that the laboratory seemed to be growing immensely larger.

The walls seemed to race away from him. The green-blue sphere of the tiny planet which he proposed to visit expanded and drew away above his head.

Abruptly fearful, alarmed at the hugeness of the room, he turned to look at the bottle he had placed to serve as a standard of size. It had grown with everything else, until it seemed to be about three feet high.

And it was swiftly expanding. It reached to the level of his shoulder. And higher!

He ran to the edge of the crystal disk, which now seemed a floor many yards across, and leaped from its edge. It was a dozen steps to where he had left the bottle. And it was as tall as himself!

He started across the floor of the laboratory toward the table under which the toy plane stood. The incredible immensity of his surroundings awed him strangely. The walls of the room seemed distant, Cyclopean cliffs; the roof was like a sky. Table legs towered up like enormous columns.

It seemed a hundred yards across the strangely rough floor to the plane. As he drew near it, it gave him huge satisfaction to see that it was of normal size, correctly proportioned to his own dimensions.

"Great luck," he muttered, "that I can fly!"

HE paused, as he reached the cabin's open door, to wonder at the astounding fact that a little while ago he had opened that door with a hand larger than his entire body now was.

"I guess this is my day of wonders!" he muttered. "Allah knows I had to wait long enough for it!"

First he examined the weapons in the cabin. There were two heavy sporting rifles and two .45 automatics. There were also two smaller automatics, which, he supposed, had been intended for Agnes' use. And there was abundant ammunition.

Then he inspected the plane. It looked to be in excellent condition in every way. The gasoline and oil tanks were full.

He set about starting the motor, using the plane's inertia starter, which was driven by an electric motor. Soon the engine coughed, sputtered, and gave rise to a roaring, rhythmic note that Larry found musical.

When the motor was warm, he opened the throttle and taxied out from beneath the colossal table, and across the laboratory floor toward the Titanic mechanism in the center of the room. The disk of crystal was set almost flush with the floor, its edge beveled. The plane rolled easily upon it, and out into the Cyclopean pillar of violet flame.

Once more, Larry felt the sensation that everything about him except the plane itself, was expanding inconceivably in size. Soon the laboratory's walls and roof were lost in hazy blue distance. He could distinguish only the broad, bright field formed by the surface of the crystal disk, with the floor stretching away beyond it like a vast plain. And above, the green-blue sphere of the tiny planet, bright on one side and dark on the other, so that it looked like a half-moon, immensely far-off.

AS he waited, he noticed a curious little dial, in a lower corner of the instrument board, which he had not seen at first. One end of its graduated scale was marked, "Earth Normal," the other, "Pygmy Planet Normal." A tiny black needle was creeping slowly across the scale, toward "Pygmy Planet Normal."

"That's how we tell what size we are, without having to look at a bottle," he muttered.

When the area of the crystal platform appeared to be about half a square mile, he decided that he would now have sufficient space to spiral up the violet ray toward the planet. If he waited too long to start, the distance would become impossibly great.

He gave the little plane the gun. The motor thundered a throbbing song; the ship rolled smoothly forward over the polished surface, gained flying speed and took the air without a shock.

"Feels good to hold the stick again!" Larry murmured.

Making small circles to keep within the upright pillar of violet radiance, he climbed steadily and as rapidly as possible, keeping his eyes upon the brilliant half-moon of the Pygmy Planet.

The strangest flight in the annals of aviation! He was flying toward a goal that, a few minutes before, he could have touched. Toward a goal that, at the beginning of his flight, was only a few lengths of his plane away. And his size dwindled so rapidly as he flew that the planet seemed to swell and draw away from him.

As Larry and the plane grew smaller, the relative size of the violet ray increased, so there was no longer much danger of flying out of it. It seemed that he flew through a world of violet flame.

He met a curious problem in time. It is evident that time passes faster for a small animal than for a large one, because nerve currents require a shorter time in transit, and all thought and action is consequently speeded up. It took a hundred-foot dinosaur nearly a second to know that his tail had been pinched. A fly can get under way in time to escape a descending swatter. The Pygmy Planet rotated in a few seconds of earth time; one of its inhabitants might have lived, aged, and died in the duration of a single day in our larger world.

SO Larry found that time seemed to pass more rapidly, or rather that the time of the world he had left appeared to move more slowly, as he adventured into smallness. He had been flying, it seemed to him, nearly an hour when he reached the level of the planet's equator.

Now it seemed a vast world, filling half the visible universe. He flew toward it steadily, until he knew, by the fading before him of the violet flame which now seemed to fill all space, that he was near the edge of the ray. And as he flew, he watched the little scale, upon which the black needle was now nearing the line marked, "Pygmy Planet Normal."

Circling slowly, keeping always on the level of the planet's equator, and near the edge of the violet ray, so as to be as close as possible to his landing place when he reached the proper size, he watched the creeping black needle.

Too, he scanned with eager eyes the planet floating before him. Bare, red deserts; narrow strips of green vegetation; shrunken, blue oceans; silvery lines of rivers, passed in fascinating panorama beneath his eyes. The rate of the planet's spinning seemed continually to lessen, with the changing of his own sense of time.

Agnes! Larry thought of her with a curious, eager pain in his heart. She was somewhere on that strange, ancient world, a prisoner of weird machine-monsters! Intended victim of a grotesque sacrificial ceremony!

Could he find her, in the vastness of an unfamiliar world? And having found her, would there be a chance to rescue her from her hideous captors? The project seemed insane. But Larry felt a queer, unfamiliar urge, which, he knew, would drive him on until he had discovered and saved her—or until he was dead.

AT last, when it seemed to Larry nearly three hours since he had begun this amazing flight, the crawling ebon needle reached the mark, "Pygmy Planet Normal."

He flew out of the wall of violet flame toward the planet's surface. Before, the distance between the planet and the ray's edge had seemed only the fraction of an inch. Now it appeared to be many miles.

Abruptly the Pygmy Planet, which had seemed to be *beside* him, appeared to swing about, so that it was *beneath* him. He knew that it was a change merely in his sensations. He was feeling the gravitation of the new world. It was pulling him toward it!

He cut the throttle, and settled the plane into a long glide, a glide that was to end upon the surface of a new planet!

In what seemed half an hour more, Larry had made a safe landing upon the Pygmy Planet. He had come down upon a stretch of fairly smooth, red, sandy desert, which seemed to stretch illimitably toward the rising sun, which direction Larry instinctively termed "east."

To the "west" was a line of dull green—evidently the vegetation along a stream. The ocher desert was scattered with sparse clumps of reddish, spiky scrub. Larry taxied the plane into one of those thickets. Finding canvas and rope in the cabin, he staked down the machine, and muffled the motor.

Then, selecting a rifle and a heavy automatic from the weapons in the cabin, and filling his pockets with extra ammunition, he left the plane and set out with brisk steps toward the green line of vegetation.

"I'll follow along the river," he reasoned. "It may lead me somewhere and it will show the way back to the plane. I may come across something in the way of a clue. Can't go exploring by air, or I'll burn up all the gas and be stranded here!"

TO his surprise, the water course proved to be an ancient canal, walled with crumbling masonry. Its channel was choked with mud and thorny, thick-leaved desert shrubs of unfamiliar variety; but a feeble current still flowed along it.

After some reflection, Larry set out along the banks of the canal.

He followed it for two days.

Curious straight bars of light were visible across the sky—a band of violet in the morning; one of crimson at evening. Their apparent motion was in the same direction as that of the sun. The bars of light puzzled him considerably before it occurred to him that they must be the red and violet rays.

"So you wait till evening, and then fly up into the red ray, to go home," he muttered. "But I may not need that information," he added grimly. "Seems to be a pretty big job to search a planet on foot, for one person. And I'm not going back without Agnes!"

In the afternoon of the second day, he came within view of a city. He could discern vast, imposing walls and towers of dark stone. It stood in the barren red desert, far back from the green line of the old canal. Larry left the canal and started wearily across toward it. He had covered several miles of the distance before he saw that the lofty towers were falling, the magnificent walls crumbling. The city was ruined, dead, deserted!

The realization brought him a great flood of despair. He had hoped to find people—friends, from whom he might get food, and information about this unfamiliar planet. But the city was dead.

Larry was standing there, in the midst of the vast red plain between ruined city and ruined canal. Tired, hungry, lonely and hopeless. He was looking up at the white "sun," trying to comfort himself with the thought that the brilliant luminary was merely a queer blue lamp, that he was upon a tiny experimental world in a laboratory. But the thought brought him no relief; only confusion and a sense of incredulity.

THEN he saw the machine-monster.

A glittering, winged thing of crystal and green metal, identical with the one he had encountered in the laboratory. It must already have seen him, for it was dropping swiftly toward him.

Larry started to run, took a few

staggering steps. Then he recalled the heavy rifle slung over his shoulder. Moving with desperate haste, he got it into his hands and raised it just as the monster dropped to the red sand a dozen yards away from him.

Steadily he covered the crystal cylinder within which the thing's brain floated in luminous violet liquid. His finger tightened on the trigger, ready to send a heavy bullet crashing into it. Then he paused, swore softly, lowered the gun.

"If I kill it," he murmured, "I may never find Agnes. And if I let it carry me off, it may take me where she is."

He walked toward the monster, across the red sand.

It stood uncertainly upon green metal legs, seeming to stare at him strangely with eye-like lenses. Its wings of thin green metal plates, were folded; its four green tentacles were twitching oddly.

Abruptly, it sprang upon him.

A green tentacle seized the rifle and snatched it from his hands. He felt the automatic pistol and the ammunition being removed from his pockets.

Then, firmly held in the flexible arms of green metal, he was lifted against the cylinder of violet liquid. The monster spread its broad emerald wings, and Larry was swiftly borne into the air.

In a few moments the wide ruins of the ancient city were spread below, with the green line of the choked canal cutting the infinite red waste of the desert beyond it.

The monster flew westward.

FOR a considerable time, nothing save barren, ocherous desert was in view. Then Larry's weird captor flew near a strange city. A city of green metal. The buildings were most fantastic—pyramids of green, crowned with enormous, glistening spheres of emerald metal. An impassable wall surrounding the city.

Larry had expected the monster to drop into the city. But it carried him on, and finally settled to the ground several miles beyond. The green tentacles released him, as the thing landed, and he sprawled beside it, dizzy after his strange flight.

As Larry staggered uncertainly to his feet, he saw that the monster had released him in an open pen. It was a square area, nearly fifty yards on each side, and fenced with thin posts or rods of green metal, perhaps twenty feet high. Set very close together, and sharply pointed at the top, they formed a barrier apparently insurmountable.

In the center of the pen was a huge and strange machine, built of green metal. It looked very worn and ancient; it was covered with patches of bluish rust or corrosion. At first it looked quite strange to Larry; then he was struck by a vaguely familiar quality about it. Looking closer, he realized that it was a colossal steam hammer!

Its design, of course, was unfamiliar. But in the vast, corroded frame he quickly picked out a steam chest, cylinder, and the great hammer, weighing many tons.

He gasped when his eyes went to the anvil.

A man was chained across it.

A man in torn, grimy clothing, fastened with fetters of green metal upon wrists and ankles, so that his body was stretched beneath the massive hammer. He seemed to be unconscious; upon his head, which was turned toward Larry, was a red and swollen bruise.

The monster which had dropped Larry within the pen rose again into the air. And Larry started forward, trying to remember just what Agnes had told him of a machine to which the monsters sacrificed.

This must be the machine—this ancient steam hammer!

As he moved forward, Agnes came into view.

SHE walked around the massive base of the great machine, carrying a bowl filled with a fragrant brown liquid. She stopped at sight of Larry, and uttered a little cry. The bowl fell from her hands, and the fragrant liquid splashed out on the ground. Her brown eyes went wide with delighted surprise; then a look of pain came into them.

"Larry, Larry!" she cried. "Why did you come?"

"To get you," he answered, trying to speak as lightly as he could. "And the best way I knew to find you was to let one of the monsters bring me. Cheer up!" But even to himself, his voice had a tone of discouragement.

She smiled wanly. "I don't see anything to be cheerful about." Her small face was set and a little white. "Dr. Whiting is going to be smashed under the hammer of this dreadful machine, whenever the steam is up. Then it is my turn. And yours. That's nothing to laugh about."

"But we aren't smashed yet!" Larry insisted.

"By the way, what was that in the bowl?" he went on, glancing down. "I forgot to bring lunch." He grinned.

She looked down, startled.

"Oh, Dr. Whiting's soup. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he'll never awake to eat it. There's plenty more. Come around here."

She picked up the bowl and led him around the base of the machine; then she filled the bowl again with the fragrant, red-brown liquid, from a tall urn of green metal. Larry took the dish eagerly and gulped down the rather insipid and tasteless food.

"And the monsters worship this old steam hammer?" he inquired, when his hunger was appeased.

"Yes. I think the thing is worked by steam generated by volcanic heat. Anyhow, there isn't any boiler, and the steam pipe comes up out of the ground. You can see that. So it runs on, without any attention—though I guess the heat is dying down, since it is several days between blows of the hammer.

"And I guess the monsters have forgotten how they used to rule machines. They seem to have depended upon machines, even giving up their own bodies for mechanical ones, until the machine rules them.

"And when this old hammer kept pounding on through the ages, using volcanic steam, I guess they got to considering it alive. They began to regard it as a sort of god. And when they got the idea of giving it sacrifices, it was natural enough to place the victims under the hammer."

THEY went back to Dr. Whiting who was chained across the anvil. He was still breathing, but unconscious. He had been injured in a struggle with the monsters, and his body was much emaciated. Agnes explained that he had been a prisoner in the pen for many months of the time of this world, waiting his turn to die; she said that the monsters had just completed the extermination of another race upon the Pygmy Planet, and were just turning to the greater world for victims.

Larry noticed that the great hammer was slowly rising in its guides, as the pressure of the steam from the planet's interior increased. In a few hours—just at sunset—it reached the top of its stroke.

The air above the pen was suddenly filled with glittering swarms of the green-winged monsters, sweeping slowly about, in measured flight, with strange order in their masses. They had come to witness the sacrifice!

With an explosive rush of steam, the hammer came down!

The ground trembled beneath the terrific blow; the roaring of escaping steam and the crash of the impact were almost deafening. A heavy white cloud shrouded the corroded green machine.

When the hammer slowly lifted, only a red smear was left. . . .

Agnes had shrunk, trembling, against Larry's shoulder. He had put his arms about her and was holding her almost fiercely.

"My turn next," she whispered. "And don't try to fight them. It will only make them hurt you!"

"I can't let them take you, Agnes!" Larry cried, in an agonized tone. And the words seemed to leap out, of themselves, "Because I love you!"

"You do?" Agnes cried, in a thin, choking voice, pressing herself against him. "Ever since the first time you came to the laboratory—"

A score of the monster forms of violet-filled crystal and gleaming green metal had dropped into the pen. They tore Agnes from Larry's arms, hurling him roughly to the ground, at the bottom of the green metal fence. For some time he was unconscious.

WHEN he had staggered painfully to his feet, it was night. The monsters were gone; the starless sky was black and empty. Calling out weakly, and stumbling about the pen, he found Agnes. She was chained where Dr. Whiting had been.

She was conscious, unharmed. For a time they talked a little, exchanging broken, incoherent phrases. Then they went to sleep, lying on the anvil, beneath that mighty hammer that was slowly lifting to strike another fearful blow.

When the "sun" had risen again, Larry brought Agnes some of the brown soup from the metal urn, which had been filled again. Then, when he had satisfied himself, he started clambering up the massive frame of the hammer.

If he could put it out of commission!

It was a difficult task. He slipped back many times, and finally had to choose another place to make the ascent. Twice he slipped and almost fell from a considerable height. But finally he reached the massive wheel of the valve which seemed to control the admission of steam into the cylinder above the hammer.

If he could but close that, the steam would be confined in the chest below. And when the pressure reached a certain point, something should happen!

The valve was not easy to turn; it seemed fixed with the corrosion of ages. For hours Larry wrestled with it. Then he left it, realizing that he must find something to use for a hammer. A vigorous search of the pen's hard earth floor failed to reveal any stone that would do. He turned his attention to the machine, and presently saw a slender projecting lever, high up on the side of the vast frame, which looked as if it had been weakened by corrosion. After a perilous climb, he reached the bar of green metal and swung his weight upon it. It broke, and he plunged to the ground with the bar in his hands.

CLAMBERING up once more to the great valve, he hammered it until the rust that stiffened it was loosened. Then he struggled with the valve until it was closed.

"We'll see what happens!" he muttered.

Returning to the ground, he set to work to break the green metal fetters upon Agnes' wrists and ankles, using the broken lever as hammer and file.

For the greater part of six days

he toiled at that task, while the great hammer rose slowly. But the green metal seemed very hard. One arm was free at the end of the second day, the other on the fourth. He had one ankle loose on the morning of the sixth day. But as evening came on, and the great hammer reached the top of its stroke, the fourth chain still defied him.

Before sunset, a swarm of the monsters appeared, wheeling on green wings. He was forced to leave the work, hiding his improvised file.

Agnes still lay across the anvil, to conceal from the monsters the fact that the chains were broken. Larry sat close beside her, nursing hands that were blistered and sore from his days of filing at the chains.

A sudden clatter came from the huge mechanism above them, and a sharp hiss of steam, which became louder.

"It works!" Larry whispered to Agnes. "The old valve held, and the steam can't get into the cylinder to smash us! But Allah knows what will happen when the pressure rises in that old steam chest!"

Darkness came. Dusk swallowed the wheeling machine-monsters. All night Larry and Agnes waited silently, together on the great anvil, listening to the hissing of steam from above, which was slowly becoming a shrill monotonous scream; monotonous, always higher, shriller.

The "sun" rose again. Still the green-winged monsters wheeled about. They came in glittering swarms, thousands of them. They came nearer the machine now, and flew about more swiftly, as if excited.

THEN it happened.

There was a roar like thunder, and a colossal, bellowing explosion. The air was filled suddenly with scalding steam, and with screaming fragments of the bursting steam chest. In the midst of it all, Larry felt a crushing blow upon the head. And a blanket of darkness fell upon him. . . .

"The monsters are all gone, darling," Agnes' voice reached him. "As though they were very much frightened. And a piece of the old hammer hit the fence and knocked a hole in it. You must go. Leave me—"

"Leave you?" Larry groaned, struggling to sit up. "Not a bit of it!" He touched his head gingerly, felt a swollen bruise.

Collecting a few fragments of the wrecked machine, to serve as tools, he fell to work again upon Agnes' remaining chain. Already he had cut a deep groove in it. Two hours later, it was broken.

Carrying the metal urn of brownish liquid, they crept out through the hole in the fence, which had been torn by the flying fragment of a broken casting of green metal. They left the wreck of the machine which a strange race had worshiped as a bloody god and hurried furtively into the desert of red sand.

Making a wide circuit about the fantastic city of green metal, which Larry had seen from the air, they struck out eastward across the desolate ocherous waste. The food in the urn, eaten sparingly, lasted until the end of the eighth day.

On the morning of the ninth, they came in view of the green line of the ancient canal. It was hours later that they staggered weakly over its wall of crumbling masonry, clambered down into the muddy, weed-grown channel, and drank thirstily of green, tepid water.

Larry found his old trail, beyond the canal. They followed it back. In the middle of the afternoon they stumbled up to the thicket of spiky desert growth, in which Larry had hidden the plane.

The machine was undamaged.

BEFORE sunset, Larry had removed the stake ropes, slipped the canvas cover from the motor, turned the plane around, inspected it, and examined the strip of smooth, hard red sand upon which he had landed.

Agnes pointed out the dim band of crimson across the sky, from north to south, slowly rising toward the zenith.

"That's the red ray," she said. "We fly into it."

"And a happy moment when we do," Larry rejoined.

He roused the motor to life.

As the bar of crimson light neared the zenith, the plane rolled forward across the sand and took off. Climbing steeply, Larry anxiously watched the approach of the red band. The gravitation of the Pygmy Planet seemed to diminish as he gained altitude, until presently he could fly vertically from it, without circling at all. He set the bow toward the scarlet bar across the sky before him.

And suddenly he was flying through ruby flame.

His eyes went to the little scale at the corner of the instrument board. He saw the little ebon needle waver, leave the mark designated "Pygmy Planet Normal" and start toward "Earth Normal."

For what seemed a long time, he was wheeling down the crimson ray. A few times he looked back at Agnes, in the rear seat. She had gone to sleep.

Then a vast, circular field was below—the crystal platform.

Larry landed the plane upon it, taxied to the center and stopped there, with the motor idling. The laboratory, taking shape in the blue abyss about him, seemed to contract swiftly.

PRESENTLY the plane covered most of the crystal disk. He taxied quickly off, stopped on the floor nearby, and cut the ignition. Agnes woke. Together they clambered from the plane's cabin and walked back into the crimson ray.

Once more the vast spaces of the room seemed to shrink, until it looked familiar once more. The Pygmy Planet, and the huge machine looming over them, dwindled to natural size.

Agnes, watching a scale on the frame of the mechanism, which Larry had not noticed, leaped suddenly from the red ray, drawing him with her.

"We don't want to be giants!" she laughed.

Larry drew a deep breath, and looked about him. Once more he was in his own world, and surveying it in his normal size. He became aware of Agnes standing close against him. He suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Wait a minute," she objected, slipping quickly from his arms. "What are we going to do about the Pygmy Planet? Those monsters might come again, even if you did wreck their god. And Dr. Whiting, poor fellow— But we mustn't let those monsters come back!"

Larry doubled up a brown fist and drove it with all his strength against the little globe that spun so steadily between the twin, upright cylinders of crimson and of violet flame. His hand went deep into it. And it swung from its position, hung unsteadily a moment, and then crashed to the laboratory floor. It was crushed like a ball of soft brown mud. It spattered.

"Now I guess they won't come back," Agnes said. "A pity to spoil all Dr. Whiting's work, though."

Larry was standing motionless, holding up his fist and looking at it oddly. "I smashed a planet! Think of it, I smashed a planet! Just the other—why it was just this evening, at the office, I was wishing for something to happen!"

Wandl, the Invader

Beginning a Four-Part Novel

(A Sequel to “Brigands of the Moon”)

By Ray Cummings

CHAPTER I

Menace from the Stars

“IT'S a planet,” I said. “A little world.”

“How little?” Venza demanded.

“One-fifth the mass of the Moon. That's what they've calculated now.”

“And how far is it away?” Anita asked. “I heard a newscaster say yesterday—”

“Newscasters!” Venza broke in scornfully. “Say, you can take what they tell you about any danger or trouble and cut it in half. And even then you'll be on the gloomy side. See here, Gregg Haljan—”

“I'm not giving you newscasters' blare,” I retorted. Venza's extravagant vehemence was always refreshing. The Venus girl, as different from Anita as Venus is from the Earth, sat and glared at me. I added, “Anita mentioned newscasters; I didn't.”

Anita was in no mood for smiling. “Tell us, Gregg.” She sat upright and tense in the big metal-

Once more Gregg, Anita, Snap and Venza are united in high peril—this time in the van of Earth's defense against the interstellar invader Wandl.

framed, upholstered chair with her knees drawn up under a dark red skirt and her chin cupped in her hands. "Tell us."

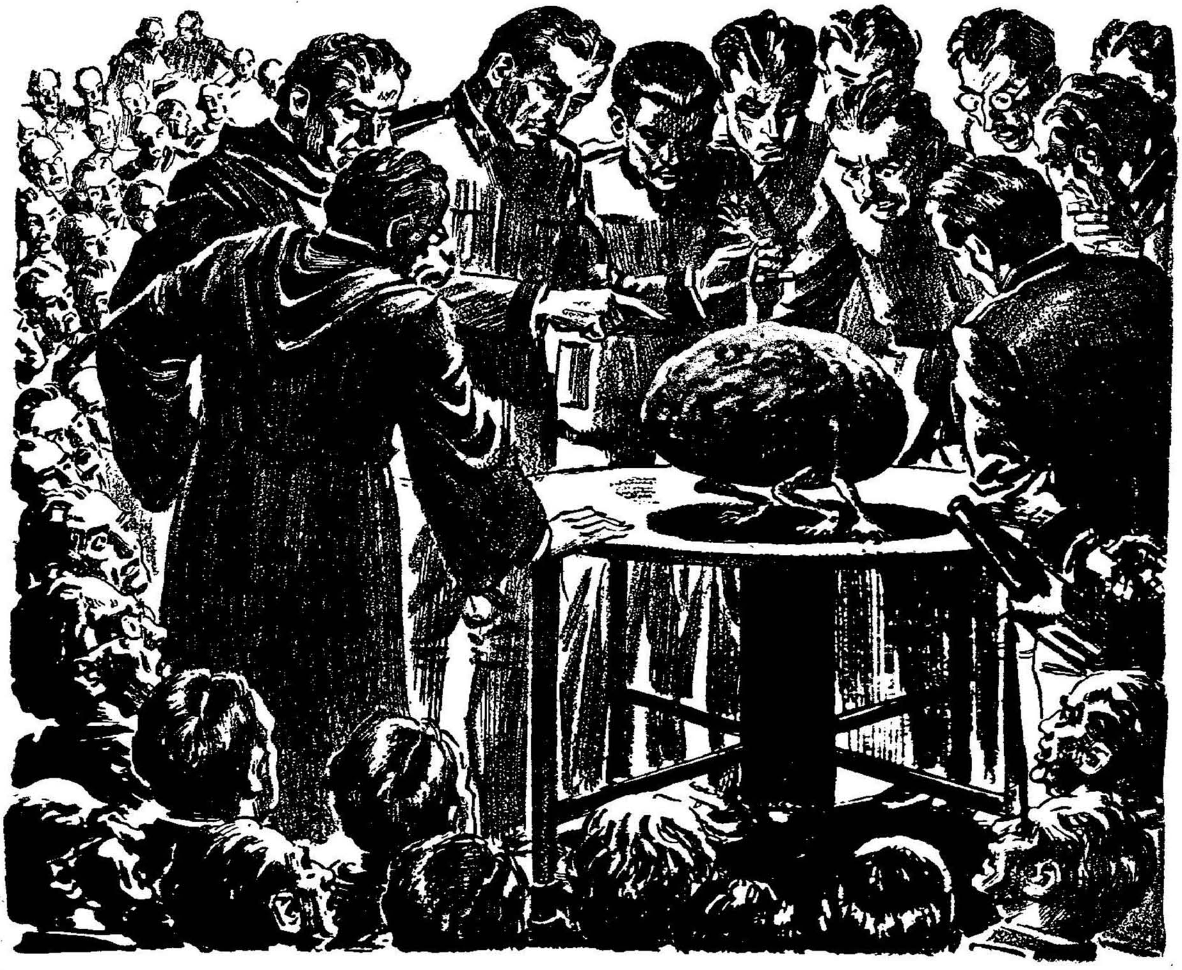
"For a fact, they don't know much about it yet," I resumed. "A planet—you can call it that. A wanderer—"

"I should say it was a wanderer," Venza exclaimed. "Coming from heaven knows where beyond the stars—swimming in here like a comet!"

"They calculated its distance yesterday at some sixty-five million miles from Earth," I said. "It isn't so far beyond the orbit of Mars, coming diagonally and heading very nearly for the Sun. But it's not a comet. It's not rational."

THE thing was indeed inexplicable. For many weeks now astronomers had been studying it. This was early summer of the year 2070 A.D. We had all of us only recently returned from those extraordinary incidents which I have already recounted, when very nearly we lost the radium treasure of Johnny Grantline on the Moon; and very nearly lost our lives as well. My ship, the *Planetara,* which in the astronomical seasons when the Earth, Mars and Venus were within comfortable traveling distances of each other, carried mail and passengers from Great-New York to Ferrok-Shahn, of the Martian Union, and to Grebbar, of the Venus Free State—that ship was

"Here it is, gentlemen. And this time, if we can make it speak—"



wrecked now, upon the Moon.*

I had been an under navigating officer of the *Planetara*. Upon her, I had met Anita Prince, whose brother and only relative now was dead; and Anita and I were soon to marry.

I was waiting now in Great-New York upon the decision of the Line officials regarding another space-flyer. Perhaps I would have command of it, since Captain Carter of the *Planetara* had been killed. Certainly Anita and I hoped so.

And then, in April of 2070, this mysterious visitor from interstellar space appeared upon our astronomical horizon. A little thing at first—a mere unusual dot, a pinpoint on a photo-electric star-diagram which should not have been there. It occasioned no comment at first, save that the astronomers thought it might be another lost outpost beyond Pluto, belonging to our solar system.

Then presently they saw it was not that, for it was coming in with the great curve of an elongated elipse. Coming at tremendous speed, it daily changed its aspect, gathering velocity until soon it was not a dot, but a streak on every diagram-plate.

In a week or so the thing passed from a mere technical astronomical curiosity to an item of public news. And now, early in June, when it had cut through the orbit of Jupiter and was approaching that of Mars, the people of all our three inhabited worlds were in a fever of curiosity. And fear was growing. The visitor was a menace. No astronomical body with a mass as great as a fifth of the Moon could come among us without causing trouble—or disaster, perhaps. The newscasters, with a ready skill for lurid possibilities, were blaring all sorts of horrible events impending.

YET for once the newscasters were short of a horrible actuality. This "wanderer," as they called the oncoming little planet, was destined to plunge the Earth, Venus and Mars into a turmoil unprecedented in the recorded history of any of the three worlds. We could not guess it, but we were upon the brink of a new warfare. Interplanetary no longer; this was interstellar. From realms so remote that our mail-ships from Venus and Mars were like children's toys flying over a grassy country lawn, this wanderer was coming with a new and almost inconceivably terrible menace. Well for us that the Martian Union, the Venus Free State and the U.S.W. were in an alliance of friendly amiability, with all our interplanetary differences adjusted! We had need of that alliance now, for standing alone any one of our worlds would have been destroyed.

But this evening in early June, as Anita, Venza and I were seated in Anita's home in the northern residential area of Great-New York beyond the terraced confines of the roaming metal city, we had no more than a premonition of these dire events.

I told the girls all I knew of the approaching wanderer. The density was similar to that of our Earth. The oncoming velocity and the calculated elements of its orbit now were such that within a few weeks more the new planet would round our Sun and presumably head outward again. It would pass within a few million miles of us, causing perhaps a disturbance to our own orbit, possibly even a change of the inclination of our axis; affecting our tides, our climate—bringing abnormality and disturbance in a thousand ways.

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*An account of these incidents was given by Gregg Haljan in "Brigands of the Moon," which appeared in the March, 1930, issue of Astounding Stories.

All this was understandable. But there were many things which were not.

"SO I've heard," Venza interrupted me. "They say that, and then they stop. Why can't a newscaster tell you what is so mysterious?"

"For a very good reason, Venza: because the government holds it back. You can't throw people into a panic. This whole thing, up to to-day, has been withheld from the Earth and the Venus publics. The Martian Union tried to withhold it, but could not. Every heliogram between the worlds is censored."

"And still," said Venza sarcastically, "you don't tell us what is so mysterious about this wanderer."

"For one thing," I said, "it changes its direction. No rational heavenly body does that. They calculated the elements of its orbit way back last April. They've done it twenty times since, and every time the projected orbit is different. Just a little at first, so that it could have been the mathematician's error. But last week the accursed thing actually took a sudden turn, as though it were a spaceship!"

The girls stared at me. "What does that mean?" Anita asked finally.

I shrugged. "They're beginning to make wild guesses—we won't go into that."

It was far from me to frighten these two girls. I had that feeling now, but within a few hours I was forced to abandon it!

"What else mysterious?" Venza demanded.

"The thing isn't normally visible."

Venza shifted her silk-sheathed legs. "Don't talk in code!"

"Not normally visible," I repeated. "A world one-fifth as large as the Moon could be seen plainly by our electrotelescopes when well beyond Pluto. It's now between Jupiter and Mars. Invisible to the naked eye, of course, but still it's not very far away—I've been out there myself. With instruments we ought to be able to see its surface; see whether it has land and water—inhabitants, perhaps. You should be able to distinguish an object on its surface as large as a city—but you can't."

"Why not?" asked Anita. "Because there are clouds? It has an atmosphere?"

"THEY don't even know that," I retorted. "There is something abnormal about the lightwaves coming from it. Not exactly blurred, but a distortion, a fading. It's obviously some aberration, some abnormality of the lightwaves, so that our telescopes can almost, but not quite distinguish the details. Even the spectroheliograph operates abnormally. Hydrogen photo-diagrams with stereoscopic lenses and wave-length selection should give a surface depth of vision."

"Cannot you say it in Anglo-Saxon, Gregg?" Venza frowned.

"I mean, the thing should not look like a flat disc. You ought to be able to tell a mountain height from a valley. But you can't. Nothing works normally. Everything is weird—"

A swift rapping on our door-grid interrupted me, and Snap Dean burst in upon us.

"Hola-lo, everybody! Is it a conference? You look so solemn."

He dashed across the room, kissed Venza, pretended that he was about to kiss Anita, and winked at me. As always, Snap lunged upon us with an energy like a battery supercharged. He was a dynamic litle fellow, small, wiry, red-headed and freckle-faced, and had been the radio-helio operator of the ill-fated *Planetara*. Under almost every adverse circumstance —and heaven knows he and I had seen enough of them together—he could muster a quick, ready laugh and the kind of wit that made everyone like him. Certainly he was a perfect match for Venza, for all the millions of miles which separated their native lands. Venza, too, was small and slim, her manner as readily jocular as his. And she had a feminine irony with which even Snap could not cope.

"And where have you been?" Venza demanded.

"Me? My private life is my own —so far. We're not married yet, since you insist on us going to Grebbar for the ceremony."

"Stop it," protested Anita. "We've been talking of—"

"I know very well what you've been talking about. Everybody is. I've got news for you, Gregg." He went abruptly solemn and lowered his voice. "Halsey wants to see us. Right away—this evening."

I REGARDED him blankly and my mind swept back. No more than a few short weeks ago Detective-Colonel Halsey of Divisional Headquarters here in Great-New York had sent for us, and we had been precipitated into many dire events. Was this a meaningless coincidence? Or an omen?

"Halsey!" I burst out.

"Easy, Gregg!" Snap cast a vague look around Anita's draped apartment. An open window was beside us, leading to a tiny catwalk balcony. It was moonlit now, and two hundred feet above the pedestrian viaduct.

But Snap frowned at it. "Easy, I tell you! Why shout about Halsey? The air can have ears upon occasion."

Venza moved and closed the window.

"What is it?" I asked, more softly.

But Snap was not satisfied. "Anita, have you got an isolation barrage for this room?"

"Of course I haven't, Snap."

"Well, you never can tell. It seems to me that anyone who even speaks to Halsey is cursed with eavesdroppers. And I've just had his office on the audiphone. Gregg, have you got a detector with you? Mine is out of order."

I had none. Snap produced his little coil and indicator dial.

"Shove me over that chair, Gregg."

He was resourceful. He disconnected one of the room's tube-lights and contacted with the cathode. It was a makeshift method at best, but as he dropped to the floor, uncoiling a little length of his wire for an external pick-up, we saw that the thing worked. The pointer on the dial-face was swaying.

"Gregg! Look at that! Didn't I tell you?"

THE pointer quivered, prised with a positive reaction. An eavesdropping ray of some sort was upon us!

Anita gasped, "Good Lord, I had no idea!"

"No, you didn't. But I did." Snap drew the balcony sheath curtains closer together. They were metallic dyed, but it helped little. With this crude equipment we could not tell if it were eavesdropping for audibility, or visibility, or even if someone with a magnetic non-reflecting invisible cloak were near us.

"No one very close," Snap said softly. He and I carried the detector to the length of its wire out into the arcade hall. The indicator went nearer normal.

"It's the other way," I whispered.

We went to the moonlit balcony. I searched its little length with my hands. No one—nothing here.

"Way down there on the pedestrian arcade," I said.

"To hell with it," Snap murmured. "I'll fix that."

Inside the room we made connection with a newscaster's blaring voice. Under cover of it we could talk.

Snap gathered us close around him. "Halsey has something important—by the gods of the airways he has! And what's more"—his voice was a furtive whisper—"it's about this damned interstellar invader. Would you think that could be connected in any way with humans here in the city, so that they would bother to eavesdrop us?"

"No," I murmured, "I wouldn't."

"Well, evidently it's true. Halsey's office paged me on a public mirror. I happened to see it at Park-Circle 40. When I answered it, Halsey's man wanted me to talk in code! I can't talk in code; I have enough to worry over with the interplanetary helios. Then they sent me to an official booth, where I got examined for positive legal identification, and then they put me on the official split-wave length. After all of which precautions I was told to be at Halsey's office to-night at midnight. And told a few other things."

"What?" demanded Venza breathlessly.

"Only hints. What's the use of taking a chance by repeating them now?"

"You said he wants me also?" I put in.

"Yes. You and Venza. We've got to get into his office secretly, by the vacuum cylinders. We're to meet a man from his office at the Eighth Postal switch-station."

"Venza?" Anita said sharply. "What in the universe can he want with Venza?"

"Don't ask me, because I don't know."

"Well, if he wants Venza, I'm going."

Snap gazed at her, and grinned. "That sounds like a logical deduction. Naturally he must want you—that's why he said Venza."

"I'm going," Anita insisted. "May I, Gregg?"

IT ended by her going. Venza thought it a good idea, and Snap and I had crossed these two girls before and been defeated at it. We left about half an hour before midnight. The girls were both in gray, with long dark capes. We took the public monorail down into the mid-Manhattan section under the city roof of the business district, and into the Eighth Postal switch-station where the sleek bronze cylinders came tumbling out of the vacuum portes to be rerouted and dispatched again.

A man was on the lookout for us.

"Daniel Dean and party?"

"Yes," said Snap. "We were ordered here."

The detective gazed at the girls and at me. "It was three altogether, Dean."

"And now it's four," said Snap cheerfully. "The extra one is Miss Anita Prince. Ever heard of her?"

He had indeed. "All right," he said, "if you and Haljan say so."

We were put into one of the oversize mail cylinders, routed through the tubes like sacks of recorded letters; and in ten minutes, with a thump that knocked the breath from all of us, we were in the switch-rack of Halsey's outer office.

We climbed from the cylinder. Our guide led us down one of the gloomy metal corridors. It echoed with our tread.

A door lifted.

"Daniel Dean and party."

The guard stood aside. "Come in."

The door slid down behind us. We advanced into the small blue-lit apartment, steel-lined like a vault, and were in the presence of Detective-Colonel Halsey, who matched wits with the criminals of three worlds and now seemed concerned with another.

CHAPTER II

The Brain in the Box

COLONEL HALSEY sat at his desk, with a few papers before him and a bank of instrument controls at his elbow. He pushed his audiphone and mirror-grid to one side.

"Sit down, please." He gave us each the benefit of welcoming smiles, and his gaze finished upon Anita.

"I came because you sent for Venza," Anita said quickly. "Please, Colonel Halsey, let me stay. I thought, whatever you wanted her for, you might need me."

"Quite so, Miss Prince. Perhaps I shall." It seemed that in his mind were many of the thoughts thronging my own, for he added:

"Haljan, I recall I sent for you like this once before. I hope this may be a more auspicious occasion."

"So do I, sir."

Snap said, "We've been afraid hardly to do more than whisper. But you're insulated here, and we're mighty curious—"

Halsey nodded. "I can talk freely to you, and yet—well, even so, I cannot." His gaze went to Venza. "It is you in whom at the moment I am most interested."

"Me? You flatter me, Colonel Halsey." She sat gracefully reclining in the metal chair before his desk, seeming small as a child between its big, broad arms. But her posture was anything but childlike. Her long gray skirt had parted to display her shapely, gray-satined legs. She had thrown off the hood of her cloak. Her thick black hair was coiled in a knot low at the back of her neck; her carmined lips bore an alluring smile. It was all instinctive. To this girl from Venus it came as naturally as she breathed.

HALSEY'S gray eyes twinkled. "Do not look at me quite like that, Miss Venza, or I shall forget what I have to say. You would get the better of me; I'm glad you're not a criminal."

"So am I," she declared. "What can I do for you, Colonel Halsey?"

His admiring, amused smile faded at once. His glance included us all.

"Just this. There is a man here in Great-New York—a Martian, whom they call Set Molo. He has a younger sister, Setta Meka. Have any of you heard of them?"

We had not. Halsey went on, slowly now, apparently choosing his words with the greatest care.

"There are things that I can tell you, and things that I cannot."

"Why not?" asked Venza.

"My dear, for one thing, if you are going to help me you can do it best by not knowing too much. For another, I have my orders. I am only supreme in this department, you know, and this thing concerns the very highest authorities, not only of the U.S.W., but in Ferrok-Shahn and Grebbar too."

He paused, but none of us spoke. It seemed to me that here in the dim muffled seclusion of this vault-like room we were dabbling with things gigantic, sinister, diabolical perhaps; things about which one dared not talk openly. And to me there came a presage of infinite evil. The life or death of a few people—what is that? The capture of this criminal or that one; the recovery of stolen money; a little treasure which one might put into a bank and find a few extra ciphers on his deposit balance! All that seemed so trivial.

BUT this which was now upon us, I could envisage, was a thing very different. Nations, worlds involved. The life or death perhaps of millions of people. It swept me with a breathless feeling of awe. And yet, how far short of the diabolical truth I really was!

Halsey was saying quietly, "Well, this Martian and his sister are here now in Great-New York. They have some secret—they are engaged in some activity—and I want to find out what it is. Little parts of it I have picked up—"

He stopped; and out of the silence Snap said, "If you don't mind, Colonel Halsey, it seems to me you are mostly talking in code."

"I'm not. But I'm trying to tell you as little as possible. You, Miss Venza—well, you need only understand this: the Martian, Set Molo, must be tricked into giving you some idea of what he is doing here in Great-New York."

"And I am to trick him?" Venza said calmly.

"That is my idea. By what method—" The faint shadow of a smile swept Halsey's thin, intent face. "My dear, you are a girl of Venus. More than that, you are traveled, sophisticated, and you have far more than your normal share of wits and brains."

It did not make Venza smile. She sat tense now, with her dark-eyed gaze fastened on Halsey's face. Anita, equally breathless, reached over and gripped her hand.

Then Venza said slowly, "I realize, Colonel Halsey, that this is something vital."

"As vital, my child, as it well could be." He drew a long breath. "I want you to understand I am doing my duty. Doing what seems the best thing—not for you, perhaps, but for the world."

I SEEMED to see into his mind at that moment. He might have been a father, sending a daughter into danger.

He added abruptly, "I need not disguise the danger. I have lost a dozen men. He lighted a cigarette. "I don't seem to be able to frighten you?"

"No," she said. And I heard Anita murmur, "Oh, Venza!"

"But you frighten me," said Snap. "Colonel Halsey, look here; you know I'm going to marry this girl very soon?"

"If you live to marry her," he said quickly. And he added, "But I think we're needlessly pessimistic. You can call it a sacrifice, a voluntary going into danger, great danger, for a great cause, in a great crisis. That's rather a usual thing; it's been done many times. You four—you have just come out of a very considerable danger. We know of what stuff you are made—all of you."

He smiled again. "Perhaps that prominence is unfortunate for you. But let me settle it now. Is there any one of you who will not take my orders and trust my judgment of what is best? And do it, if need be, blindly? Will you offer yourselves to me?"

We gazed at each other. Both the girls instantly murmured, "Yes." The feminine mind needs no slow process of thought!

"Yes," I said at last. And it came not too hard for me, for I thought I was yielding him Venza; not Anita.

Snap was very pale. He stared from one to the other of us.

"Yes," he said finally. "But Colonel Halsey, surely you can tell us—"

HALSEY tossed his cigarette away. "I will tell you as much as I think best. These Martians, this Set Molo and his sister, do not know of Venza. Or, at least, I think they do not. They apparently have not been here very long. How they got here we don't know. There was no passenger or freight ship. They have, in Ferrok-Shahn, a dubious reputation at best. I won't go into that.

"Venza, I will show you these Martians—and the rest depends upon you. There is a mystery; you will find out what it is! Get me even a hint of it!"

He reached for his inter-office audiphone. "I want to locate the Martian Set Molo. Francis, Staff X2, has it in charge."

The audible connection came in a moment.

"Francis?"

We could hear the answering microphonic voice.

"Yes, Colonel."

"Is the fellow in a public place by any chance?"

"In the Red Spark Cafe, Colonel. With his sister, and a party."

"Good enough! The Red Spark has an image-finder. Have you visual connection?"

"Yes. The whole damn room; they got a dozen finders. Any time the Red Spark passes up publicity—"

"Use a magnifier. Get me the closest viewpoint you can."

"It's done, Colonel. I did it just in case you called."

"Connect it."

In a moment our mirror-grid was glowing with the two-foot square image of the interior of the Red Spark Cafe. I knew the place by reputation: a fashionable, more or less disreputable eating, drinking and dancing restaurant, where money and alcholite flowed freely, and the patrons were drawn from all the most successful criminals of the three worlds, intermingled with thrilled, respectable tourists who hoped they would see something really evil—and generally were disappointed.

The Red Spark was not far from Halsey's office; it was perched high in a break of the city roof, almost directly over Park-Circle 29.

"There he is," said Halsey.

WE crowded around his desk. The image showed the interior of a large oval room, balconied and terraced; a dais dance-floor, raised high in the center with three professional couples gyrating there; and beneath them the public dance-grid, slowly rotating on its central axis. A hundred or so couples were dancing. The lower floor was crowded with dining tables; others were upon the little catwalk balconies, and still others in the terraced nooks and side niches, half enshrouded, half revealed by colored draperies.

The image now was silent, for Halsay was not bothering with audible connection. But it was a riot of color—flashing colored flood-lights bathing the dancers in vivid tints; and there were twinkling spots of colored tube-lights on all the tables. I saw, too, the blank rectangles of darkness against the walls which marked the private dining rooms, insulated against sight and sound, where one might go for frivolous indiscretion—or for dire plotting, perhaps—and be as secure from interruption as we were, here in Halsey's office.

Venza asked eagerly, "Which is he?"

"Over there on the third terrace, to the left. That table. There seem to be six of them in the party."

We heard Francis' voice; he was in Halsey's lower Manhattan office, with this same image before him.

"We'll get a closer viewpoint."

THE table in question was no more than a square inch on our image. We could see an apparently gay party of men and women. One of the couples was gigantic, a Martian man and woman obviously. The others seemed to be Earth or Venus people.

Francis' voice added:

"I've got a sound-wave magnifier on them. Foley's been listening for an hour. Nice, clear English—much good it does you! This fellow is as cautious as a director of the lower air-lane. . . . Here's your near-look."

Our image shifted to another viewpoint. The lens-eye with which we were connected now was mounted over the draperies behind the Martian's table. We were looking down diagonally upon the table, at a distance of no more than ten or fifteen feet, so that its image filled all our grid.

There were three Earth-women in the party. There was nothing peculiar about them: rather handsome, dissolute in appearance, all of them obviously befuddled by alcholite. There was a man who could have been Anglo-Saxon; about him too there appeared nothing unusual—a wastrel, probably with more money than wit. He wore a black dinner suit, edged with white.

Our attention focussed upon the other two. They were tall, as are all Martians. The young woman—Setta Meka—seemed perhaps twenty or twenty-five years of age, by Earth clocking; and in stature perhaps very nearly my own height, which is six feet two. It is difficult to tell a Martian's age; but she was, I saw, a very handsome young woman, even by Earth standards; and in Ferrok-Shahn she would be considered a beauty. Her gray-black hair was parted and tied at the back with a plaited metal rope. Her short dark cloak—so luminous a fabric that it caught and reflected the sheen of all the gaudy restaurant lights—was parted, its ends thrown back over her shoulders. Beneath it she wore the characteristic Martian leathern jacket, and short wide leather trousers ornamented with spun metal fringes and tassels. Most Martian women have a very war-like aspect, more masculine than feminine; but I saw now that Setta Meka was an exception.

HER brother, who sat beside her, was a full seven feet or more. A hulking sort of fellow, far less spindly than most of his race, so that I judged he might have come from the polar outposts beyond the Martian Union. He was bare-headed, his gray-black hair clipped close upon a round bullet head, with the familiar Martian round eyes.

I gazed from the viewpoint of ten feet or so into the face of this Set Molo, as momentarily he turned toward the concealed lens-eye. It was a rough-hewn, strongly masculine face of high-bridged, hawk-like nose; bushy black brows frowning above deep-set round eyes. The face of a keen-brained villain, I could not doubt, though the smooth-plucked gray skin was flushed now with alcholite, and the wide, thin-lipped mouth was leering at the woman across the table from him.

Like his sister, he too had thrown back his cloak, disclosing a brawny, powerful figure, leather-clad, with a wide belt of dangling ornaments, some of which probably were weapons.

How long we gazed at this silent colored image of the restaurant table I do not know. I was aware of Halsey's quiet voice:

"Look him over, Miss Venza. It depends upon you."

Another interval passed. It

seemed, as we watched, that Molo's interest in his drunken party was very slight. I got the impression too that though he seemed intoxicated, he was not. Nor was his sister. An anxiety seemed upon her. The smile she had for the drunken jests seemed forced; and at intervals she would cast a swift, furtive glance across the gay restaurant scene.

More drink arrived. The Earth people at the table here seemed upon the verge of stupor; and suddenly it appeared that Molo had completely lost interest in them. With a gesture to his sister, he abruptly rose from his seat. She joined him. They left the table; and a red-clad floor manager of the restaurant came at their call. Then in a moment they were moving across the room.

Halsey called sharply into his audiphone: "Francis! Hold us to them if you can!"

OUR image blurred. Then Foley, in the restaurant, picked them up from another viewpoint. They were standing now by the opened door of one of the Red Spark's private insulated rooms. We caught a glimpse of its interior—a gaily set table with a bank of colored lights over it.

The figure of a man was in there. He was on his feet, as though he had just arrived to meet the Martians here, and a hooded long cloak wholly enveloped him. It may have been a magnetic "invisible" cloak, with the current now off. I think perhaps that it was.

We caught only the fleetest of impressions before the insulated door closed and barred our vision. The glimpse was an accident. Molo, taken by surprise at this appearance of his visitor, could hardly have guarded against it. The waiting figure was very tall—I thought some ten feet—and very thin. The hood shrouded his face and head. In his hand he held a large circular box of black shiny leather, of the sort in which women carry wide-brimmed festive hats. As Molo joined him he put the box gently upon the floor. He handled it as though it were extraordinarily heavy. And as he took a step or two, he seemed weighted down. Just as the room door was hastily closing—Meka sliding it from the inside—we caught a fleeting glimpse of horror.

The lid of the hat box on the floor had lifted up. Inside the box was a great round thing of gray-white—a living thing; a distended ball of membrane, with a network of veins and blood-vessels showing beneath the transparent skin.

For that instant we gazed, stricken. The ball was palpitating, breathing! I saw convolutions of inner tissue under the transparent skin of membrane. A little tentacle, like an arm with a flat-webbed hand, was holding up the lid of the box. The lid rose a trifle higher; the colored lights overhead gleamed down and gave us a brief but clear view of it.

The thing in the box was a huge, living brain! I saw goggling, protruding eyes; an orifice that could have been a nose, and a gash upended for a vertical mouth. It was a face! And the little tentacle arm holding up the box-lid was joined to where the ear should have been!

Was this something human? A huge distended human brain, with the body withered to that tiny arm?

The palpitating thing sank down in the box and the lid dropped. And upon our horrified gaze the insulated door of the room slid closed—a blank rectangle of darkness, with the silence and invisibility of the barrage upon it!

CHAPTER III

Diabolical Mystery

"BY the gods!" exclaimed Halsey. "One of them dares come to the Red Spark! Here, almost in public!"

So Halsey knew what this meant? But he would not tell us. His eyes were blazing now; his face was white, and with an intensity of emotion which transfigured it.

"Francis, did you see that? No, I don't want you to do anything; let them alone in there. Tell Foley I'll be in the manager's office in five minutes. I'm coming."

He snapped off. Our image connection with the Red Spark went dead.

"We're going to the Red Spark?" I demanded.

"Yes. You can come. And I want you, Venza. This changes everything—yet I don't know. I may need you more than ever, now."

"No!" protested Snap.

But Halsey was herding us to the office door and he did not answer. From his desk he had snatched up a few portable instruments, and he flung on a cloak.

It was a brief trip to the Red Spark, on foot through the subcellar arcade to where, under Park-Circle 29, we went up in a vertical lift to the roof. We were in the side entrance oval of the restaurant in under five minutes.

I had tried to question Halsey. "That thing in the box—" But he silenced me. In the dim metal room of Orentino, the Red Spark's manager, where Foley was waiting for us, a barrage was up. We could hear it faintly humming, and see the little line of blue-yellow sparks snapping along the angles of the walls. Now we could talk.

HALSEY slammed the door down. He said swiftly, "My men caught one of those things this morning. They have it now, and I think Molo does not yet know we captured it. A human brain; we're convinced that it understands English and can talk—but no one has been able to make it talk yet! Foley, order that damned Orentino to de-insulate the room Molo is in. Now, by the gods, we may see and hear something!"

The frightened Italian manager of the Red Spark was in the restaurant's control room. Halsey killed our barrage to let the outside connections get through to us. We all crowded around the mirror-grid which stood here on Orentino's desk. Foley gave us connection with the control room; we saw Orentino's fat, swarthy face, with his eyes nearly popping from fright.

"But yet, Colonel Halsey, I will do whatever you tell me!"

"What room is that Martian occupying?"

"Insulated 39."

"Break off the insulation. Do it slowly and he may not notice. Then give us connection—audible and visible."

"But I have no image-finders in the insulated rooms, for why should I have installed—"

"Cut off the barrage—I'll get connection there!"

Foley was already setting up his eavesdropper on the desk. The mirror blurred a little; then it clarified. We had the interior of the secret room! And voices were coming out of Foley's tiny receiver!

THE image showed the box on the floor, with its lid down. The tall hooded shape of the stranger stood with Molo and his sister by the table. They were talking in swift, vehement undertones. The language was Martian, a dialect principally used in Ferrok-Shahn. Our equipment brought it in, blurred and scratched, but clear enough to be distinguishable. I could understand it.

Molo was saying: "But you are the fool to have dared come here!"

"The master is confused. He knows that there is danger. Something is wrong." The hooded stranger spoke like a foreigner. Not a Martian, not an Earthman—and not like any person of Venus I had ever heard. A strange, weirdly indescribable intonation. It was a queerly flat, hollow voice.

"I am saying the master is confused—"

"Well, let him be."

"And he demanded I bring him here to find you. He is displeased that you are here."

What gruesome thing was this? Their glances seemed to go to the box on the floor at their feet, as though the master were in there. But the lid of the box did not rise.

"Well, you have found me," Molo declared impatiently. "When you know me better, always you will find I have my wits. The thing is for to-morrow night—not to-night."

"But that, my master is not sure." The hollow voice was deferential but insistent. "He fears danger. He swears that something has gone wrong. He is working on it now, striving to receive the message. There is a message! He knows that much. Perhaps from our world Wandl itself."

FOR a moment Molo had no answer. His sister had not spoken. I noticed suddenly that her gaze seemed to be roving the room.

"What is it I should do?" Molo asked at last.

"Come with us to your home-room."

"But I have everything ready there. The contact is ready for to-morrow night. Your world will control Earth! To-morrow night—"

"But if it be to-night?"

Again Molo was silent. My breath stopped. On our mirror I saw the stranger's hood part just a little. There seemed to be no face; just the blur of something brownish!

"But if it be to-night?" insisted the voice.

"I will go," Molo agreed abruptly. "But that your coming here was dangerous. Suppose we cannot get out undetected? You know I will never go to where all our instruments are set up and have some damnable spy follow me. Is all going well on Venus and Mars?"

"Yes. My master feels so. He seems to get messages; the contacts will be made simultaneously." A gruesome chuckle! "The capture of these three worlds—we shall have all three enchained at once! Helpless!"

The lid of the black box seemed again about to rise when there came a sharp cry from Meka. "This room is not insulated! The hum is gone—the sparks!"

Our eavesdropping was discovered! Beside me I heard Halsey give a low curse. On our mirror we saw sudden action. The ten-foot cloaked figure laboriously lifted the black box, and swung with it toward the outer wall of the room. I saw now clearly with what a dragging, heavy tread that giant shape moved—as though it weighed, here on Earth, far more than the normal weight to which it was accustomed.

"Over there!" Molo gasped. "The escape-porte; this room has one! Meka, go with him! I will join you—you know where!"

Foley cried, "Colonel, I may be able to stop them!"

But Halsey saw on our image that Molo was staying. "Wait! Let them go! If we have the Martian here we'll do better."

I saw the room's escape-porte

swing open as Meka and the hooded shape carrying the box moved for it. How many indiscreet wives, upon frivolous occasions, had done just that! The moonlit darkness of the outer catwalk enveloped the disappearing figures.

MOLO was left alone. He closed the porte swiftly. His detector was now in his hand, but Halsey anticipated him by a second or two. Our listener went dead; our mirror darkened. Doubtless Molo was never sure whether he had been spied upon or not.

Halsey was on his feet. "Foley, get out into the main room! Stay with him!"

But there was no need to follow Molo. Evidently he had stayed to allay suspicion; sent his visitor and sister out by the escape-porte, which was usual enough; and now he was back in the main room as though nothing important had happened. An appearance of intoxication had again come to him. He wavered jovially across the room, threading his way through the gay diners, and reached the table where his drunken party still sat carousing.

We saw all this from Orentino's mirror-grid, here in the manager's office. And then we saw that surreptitiously Molo was using his detector, trying to verify if ray-vibrations were upon him. We saw im turn and gaze toward the lens-ye in the curtains behind him.

Again Halsey shut us off. "He on't make a move with any ray him, that's evident."

"You want him to leave?" I mur- red.

"Of course I do. I want him to ve unsuspecting. If we had ght him—and that thing in the —it would have told us noth- He's got a base somewhere in city—something damnable— lic! You heard what they said about it. We've got to trick him into going there, unsuspecting."

HALSEY seized the audiphone. His gaze went to Venza. "Your chance. It's the only way. Foley? Keep away from that Martian! Shut off every ray, every lens in the place. I'll meet you out there in a moment. I'm sending a girl; she'll go after him."

"You—you want me to go now?" murmured Venza.

"Yes. It's the only way. He'll think, presently, that no one is interested in him. Perhaps you can get him drinking. Oh, Venza, if you have any wiles to beguile men, use them now!"

"No!" gasped Snap. "No, I tell you!"

Anita was clinging to Venza. She cried abruptly, "Colonel Halsey, I'm going! Two of us!"

Halsey stared. Upon many dire occasions he had been forced to swift decision. He made one now.

"You may go. That is still better. My girls—do your best! All your wits!"

I jumped to my feet. Anita going into this!

"Colonel Halsey, I should think you could do something better than—"

He gripped me by the shoulders. "Gregg Haljan, I take no suggestions from you!" His blazing eyes bored into me. "Don't you realize this means destruction of our three inhabited planets? I'll sacrifice anything—myself, or you, or these girls! Venza, take Anita outside! I'll join you in a moment—give you last instructions. You must take with you a portable audiphone."

"I won't let her go," protested Snap. "This is diabolical!"

Halsey's face softened a little. "I can understand how you feel. But it's necessary. You can't force this Molo. Nor that thing in the cloak, nor the brain in the box. But if these girls can trick Molo, find the course of this thing—"

The girls were moving toward the door of the room. I met Snap's anguished gaze.

"Gregg! Don't let them go!"

"No! No, I won't!"

I made a lunge past Halsey, with Snap after me. Halsey did not move from his place, but one of his rays struck us. With all my senses numbed I felt myself falling.

"Gregg—don't—let them—"

Snap had tumbled half upon me. My senses did not quite fade. I was aware of Anita's and Venza's horrified cries, but Halsey forcibly pushed them to the door. It slid up. I vaguely saw the two girls going out with Halsey after them; and the door coming down, leaving Snap and me lying stricken on the floor.

CHAPTER IV

Death of the Brain

I HAVE no clear idea how long it was before Halsey came back. Ten minutes or half an hour? Snap and I were seated on a low metal bench against the wall. The effect of the accursed paralyzing ray was wearing off. We were tingling all over, clinging to each other on the bench, with our senses still confused; and within me—and I know that Snap felt the same—was a feeling of terror that the girls had gone upon such a mission, queerly mingled with a sense of shame at our actions in trying to stop them. A sacrifice? A danger for the good of many others, whose lives are as important to them as ours to us? Of course we would risk such a sacrifice, and that Halsey had had to force us was humiliating. Yet the human mind individualizes. The terror menacing the worlds was a vague generality; our love for those two girls was very real.

Halsey stalked in upon us. "So you are recovered?"

Snap stammered, "We—I say, we're sorry as hell we acted like that."

"I know you are." His voice softened. "If I could have done anything else, believe me, I would. But I hope—I don't think harm will come to them. They are clever."

"Are they outside?" I asked. "Did they find a way of meeting the Martian? How long have you been gone?"

HALSEY merely stared at me as though he had no intention of answering. And then the audiphone on the desk buzzed.

"This is Halsey," he said. "Yes, I have them here. Bring them—did you say bring them?"

We could not hear the answering voice, for Halsey had the muffler in contact.

"No, I would prefer not to come. I'm watching something. I'm at the Red Spark Cafe. Well, I'm going back to my office presently, to wait there."

He turned suddenly into talking code. Like Snap, I had never had occasion to learn it. The words were a strangely sounding staccato gibberish. He ended, "I will send them. Grantline? Very well, I will tell them to locate him. At once, yes."

Halsey closed off the audiphone and swung on us.

"You're all right now?"

"Yes," I said. I stood up, drawing Snap up with me. I was determined now, at least, that we would have the stomach to act like men, and not like frightened moonstruck lovers. I added, "What is wanted of us, Colonel Halsey?"

"That's better, Gregg." He smiled. The flashing anger was gone from him now, but he was still grim. "I wanted you here t wait for this call from the Conclave of Public Safety. It met at midnight. They have ordered you there—you two."

"Where?" asked Snap. "That's a secret meeting, isn't it? There was no report of it over the air tonight."

"Yes, secret. I don't know the location myself. They wanted me also." He smiled his faint smile again. "But I begged off, as you heard."

He was leading us to the door. "They won't need you for more than half an hour. When they finish, come back to my office. You can come openly." He stood with his finger on the door lever. "Good-by, lads. From the service room here—Foley will lead you to it—you are to take a mail cylinder for Postal switch-station 20. They'll re-route you from there to the conclave auditorium—whichever one has been selected."

THE door slid up. "When you disembark," he added, "ask for Johnny Grantline. You are to sit with him."

"Good-by, sir," I said.

He showed us out, and the door slid down upon him. We trudged the corridor, and Snap gripped me.

"For myself," he whispered swiftly, "I'll go to the damnable conclave because I'm ordered. But I won't stay there long. Half an hour, didn't he say? Once we get out of it, if I don't route myself back here to the Red Spark, I'm a motor-oiler."

I agreed with him. It did not seem so utterly terrifying now. We had a mental picture of Anita and Venza in the Red Spark's public room. Doubtless Orentino had created a way for them to meet Molo. They would sit here in the Red Spark with that drunken party, and in less than an hour we would be back.

But as we passed diagonally across an end of the main room with Foley leading us, we caught a glimpse of Molo's table. The drunken party was still there. But Molo, Anita and Venza were gone!

We had no time to get any information. Foley abruptly left us, and another man took his place. In the service room a passenger cylinder was waiting. Our guide entered it with us. At the switch-station we had our breath knocked out with the bumping, but the cylinder remained sealed. And after another ten minutes in the vacuum tube, we reached our unknown destination.

The cylinder-slide opened. We found ourselves with a lone guard; and through a gloomy arcade opening Johnny Grantline was advancing to greet us.

"Well, so here you are, Gregg. Hell to pay heaven going on here. Come on in; I'll tell you."

"We were sent for," Snap said.

"Yes. They told me to contact with you. But they don't want you yet. Come on in."

HE waved away the guard and led us through a padded arcade into a low, vaulted audience room, windowless and gloomy. Across it, a doorway panel stood ajar. Grantline peered through it. There was the glow of light from the adjoining room and the distant, blended murmur of many voices.

Grantline closed the door. "They don't want you yet. They'll buzz us. Sit down and I'll tell you—"

"Where are we?" I asked. "That damned cylinder routed us unknown."

"The Ninth Conclave Hall."

I knew its location: lower Manhattan, high under the city roof.

Grantline produced little cigarette cylinders.

"Steady your nerves, lads. You'll need it."

He grinned at us. The hand with which he lighted my cylinder was steady as a tower-base; but he was excited, nevertheless. I could see it by the glint in his eyes, and hear it in his voice.

"What's going on?" Snap demanded.

"It's about this invading planet. By the gods, when you hear what's really been learned about it!—"

"Well, what?" I asked.

HE sketched what he had heard this night at the conclave. The mysterious invader was inhabited.

"How do they know that?" Snap put in.

"Don't be a nit-wit. Wait till you hear the rest of it. The accursed thing changes its orbit. It banks and turns like a space-ship! It stopped out in space. It's poised out there now between Mars and Jupiter. A world a fifth or sixth as big as our Moon, and it swims of its own volition! It's inhabited, and the beings on it can control its movements! They've brought it in from interstellar space, into our solar system. Evidently the point they've reached now is as far as they want to come. They've poised out there, getting ready to attack, not only us, but Mars and Venus simultaneously."

Grantline gazed at us through the smoke of his cigarette. He was much like Snap, this Johnny Grantline. Small, wiry, brisk of movement and manner. But he was much older than Snap; his hair was greying at the temples; his voice always carried the authority of one accustomed to commanding men.

"Don't ask me for the technicalities of how they reached these conclusions. I'm no super-astronomer. I'm only telling you what the discussion has been here for the past hour."

Heaven knows we had no inclination to dispute them. What we had seen and heard at the Red Spark during this hour tallied very well with his words.

He went on swiftly, "The attack, of whatever nature it may be, they seem to feel is impending at once. Not next month, or next week, but now! Lord, Gregg, I don't blame you for staring like that! You don't know what's been going on for the past two days—on Earth, and Venus and Mars. Of course you don't; it's all been suppressed. Neither did I, until I heard it here to-night. The U.S.W.—the Martian Union—the Venus Free State—all of us are preparing for war! Call it governmental panic, if you like. You didn't know, did you, that every government space-flyer on the Earth is being commissioned? We're not going to sit around and wait for invaders to land! The war—if there is to be one—won't be fought on Earth if we can help it."

WE stared. Snap said:

"What makes them think—"

"That a war is coming?" Grantline finished for him. "Plenty. This new planet has sent out space-ships! The planet itself is hovering sixty million miles away from us. About forty million miles from Mars and close to ninety million from Venus. Perhaps its leaders think that's the most strategic spot. At any rate, there it is, and it's poised there.

"Then it sent out space-ships, three of them. One—right now, to-night—is hovering close to Venus. Another is near Mars, and the third is some 200,000 miles off Earth! Several of our interplanetary freighters are overdue; it seems now that they must have encountered these invading ships and been destroyed."

An enemy ship hovering now within 200,000 miles of Earth! Closer even than our nearby Moon!

Grantline was continuing vehemently.

"Still more, and worse: these three hovering ships have already landed the enemy on Mars and Venus. The helio-reports mention mysterious encounters in Ferrok-Shahn and Grebbar. For three or four days Mars has been in a panic of apprehension, Venus almost as bad. And here on Earth: the enemy has landed here! Not many, perhaps; but one has been captured! A thing—God, it's almost beyond description."

We could well agree with that, since Snap and I had just seen one.

"They've got it here," Grantline was saying. "They've tried to make it talk! They can't, but they're going to try again. Force it, this time! It seems to understand our language; the light in its eyes when they speak to it—"

A shudder was in his voice. He jumped to his feet and went to the door of the room, probed it open a trifle and came back to us.

"They're bringing it in." Upon his face was a look of awed horror, the look which everyone bears when fronted with the gruesome mystery of the unknown. "Come on; let's watch."

We stood crowding the small door-oval. It gave onto a darkened little balcony of the conclave hall. The girders of the city roof were over us. There were a few official spectators sitting up here in the dark on the balcony, but none noticed us.

THE lower floor of the hall was lighted. Around the polished oblong tables perhaps a hundred scientists and high governmental officials of the three worlds were seated. Near the center of the hall was a small dais-platform. On a table there someone had just placed a circular black box, similar to the one we had seen previously.

The hall was hushed and tense. On the dais stood a group of Earth officials. One of them spoke.

"Here it is, gentlemen. And this time, by God, if we can make it speak—"

"The War Secretary from Great-London," Grantline whispered.

I recognized him—Brayley, Commander in Chief of the land, air, water and space armies of the United States of the World. He was gigantic in stature, with a great shock of gray-white hair. A commanding figure, if there ever was one.

Beside him the little Japanese representative in Great-New York—one Nippor—seemed a pigmy. The acoustics of the silent hall carried his soft voice up to us.

"Will we use force? Torture, now—it is vital, necessary."

"Yes, by God! Anything!"

It seemed that everyone in the hall must have been shuddering; I could feel it like an aura pounding up at me. Brayley lifted the box-lid; and with his naked hands reached in and raised the horrible thing; held it up, a two-foot ball of palpitating gray-white membrane. Another living brain! A human thing.

"Now, damn you, you're going to talk to us! Understand that! We're going to make you talk. Get that box out of the way!"

They flung the box to the floor, and Brayley placed the brain on the table. The glare of light from an overhead dome came down full upon it. Beneath the stretched taut membrane the convolutions of the brain showed like tangled purple worms. The blood-vessels seemed distended almost to bursting now, for the thing was terrified. The gruesome face, with popping eyes and that gaping mouth, showed a horrible travesty of terror. From where its ears should have been, a crooked little arm of flabby gray-white flesh came down, one on each side, and braced the table. And I saw now that it had a shriveled body, or at least little legs, bent, almost crushed under it by its weight.

"Now, damn you"—Brayley stood rubbing off his hands against his coat—"for the last time, will you talk?"

THE goggling eyes held with terrified but baleful gaze upon Brayley's face. Did it understand? The eyes were fronted our way, and suddenly their glance swung up so that I seemed for an instant to see down into them. And it swept me then: this was a thing of greater intelligence—greater knowledge, perhaps—than our own. A human, with brain so developed that through myriad generations the body was shriveled, almost gone, and only this distended brain was left. A mind was housed here, an intelligence—housed in this monstrous brain which itself was unhampered by any bony container of skull.

Were these the beings of the new planet which had come to attack us? But how could this helpless thing—incapable of almost everything, obviously, save thought—do the work of its world? How could this enemy space-ship, hovering now only 200,000 miles away, be built and launched and guided, with only things like this to command it?

Then I recalled again that insulated room of the Red Spark Cafe: the thin, ten-foot hooded shape which was carrying the black box. Was that, perhaps, an opposite type of being? A human, with the brain submerged, dwarfed, and the body paramount? It had called one of these brains "master." Were there, on this mysterious planet, two co-existing types of humans? Each a specialist, one for the physical work and skill, and the other for the mental?

It was an instant rush of thoughts as I stood with Snap and Grantline in that dark balcony doorway, gazing down to where the giant brain stood braced upon its shriveled arms and legs, terrified and yet glaring defiance of these men of Earth, Mars and Venus who were here under its gaze. And I realized then why we of Earth and Venus and Mars are all cast in the same mould we call human. It is a little family of planets, here in our solar system. For countless eons we have been close neighbors. The same sunlight, the same general conditions of life, the same seed, were strewn here by a wise Creator. A man from the Orient is different from an Anglo-Saxon. A man of Mars differs a little more. But basically they are the same.

YET here, confronting us now, was a new type. From realms of interstellar space, far beyond our solar system, this new human had come. What knowledge, what new methods of thought, conceptions of human relations it might hold, who could guess? But that it came as an enemy, intent upon destroying us unless we destroyed it—that much seemed obvious.

"For the last time, will you talk?" cried Brayley.

There was another interval of silence. The eyes of the brain were very watchful. Its gaze roved the hall as though it were seeking for help. It shifted its little arms on the table, seemingly exhausted already from the physical effort of supporting itself.

Brayley's voice came again. "Doubtless you can feel pain. We'll see."

With what effort of will to overcome his revulsion we may only guess, he reached forward and pinched the little arm. The result was electrifying. From the up-ended slit of mouth in that goggling face came a scream. It pierced the heavy tense silence of the hall, a scream ghastly in its timbre; weird, unearthly, like nothing that any of us had ever heard before. And in it was conveyed an agony of physical suffering, as though Brayley had inflicted, not a little pinch of that flabby arm, but had thrust a red-hot knife into its vitals.

The brain could feel pain indeed! It crouched with stiffened arms and legs; the membrane of its great head seemed to bulge with greater distension; the knotted blood-vessels were gorged with purple blood. The eyes rolled. Then it closed its mouth. Its gaze steadied upon Brayley's face, so baleful a gaze that as I caught the reflection of its luminous purple glow a shudder of fear and revulsion swept me.

"So you did not like that?" Brayley steadied his voice. "If you don't want more, you had better speak. How did you get here on Earth? What are you trying to do here?"

THERE seemed an interminable interval of silence. Then Nippor, the little Japanese, took a menacing step forward.

"Speak! We will force it from you!" He spread his lean brown fingers before the brain's face. "Shall I stab into you?"

And then it spoke. "Do—not—touch—me—again!"

Indescribable voice! Human, animal or monster no one could say. But the words were clear, precise; and for all their terror, they seemed to hold an infinite command.

A wave of excitement swept the hall, but Brayley's gesture silenced it. He leaped forward and bent low over the palpitating brain.

"So you can talk? You come as an enemy. We have given you every chance to-day for friendship, and you have refused. You come allied with Martian criminals. You have a ship, quite near us, out in space. What are you trying to do to us?"

It only glared.

"Speak!"

"I will not tell you anything!"

"Oh, yes, you will!"

"No!"

All the men on the platform were crowding close to it now.

"Speak!" ordered Brayley again. "Here in Great-New York the Martian, Molo, has a hiding place. Where is it?"

No answer.

"WHERE is it? You are perhaps a leader of your world. I lead ours—and I'm going to master you now. Where is this hiding place?"

The thing suddenly laughed, a gruesome, eerie cackle. "You will know when it is too late! I think it is too late already!"

"Too late for what?"

"To save your world. Doomed, your three worlds! Don't—touch—me!"

It ended with a scream of apprehension. The exasperated, hot-tempered Japanese had reached for it. His fingers closed on the crooked little arm. He rasped:

"Tell us what to do to save ourselves!"

"No! Let—me—go!"

"Tell us! You damnable—"

"No!" It screamed again. "Let—me—go!"

"Tell us! By the Lord, if you don't—"

Nippor strengthened his squeezing grip. The thing was writhing; the thin ball of membrane palpitating, heaving. And suddenly it burst! Over all its purpled surface, blood came with a gush!

Nippor and Brayley staggered backward. The scream of the brain ended in a choking gurgle. The little legs and tiny body wilted under it. The round ball of membrane sank to the table. It rolled sidewise upon one arm and ear, and in a moment its palpitations ceased. A purple-red mass of blood, it lay deflated and flabby.

It was dead!

CHAPTER V

The Star-Streak

"BUT see here," I said, "did they mention the Martian, Molo, at all? Brayley told that accursed thing out there—"

"They were discussing Molo before you arrived," Grantline told us.

We had drawn back from the doorway. The conference, with the dead thing on the table removed, was proceeding. Snap and I had momentarily forgotten Anita and Venza; but now we were in a panic to get back to the Red Spark.

"But you can't go," said Grantline. "Brayley ordered you here. He'll want to see you in a moment."

"Well, why don't he see us now?" Snap protested. "I'm not going to cool myself off sitting here."

"Oh, yes, you are."

Grantline sent word to Brayley that we were here. In a moment the answer came; we were to wait a short time and then he would want to see us.

We swiftly told Grantline what had happened at the Red Spark, and found that already he knew most of it. Francis had relayed it to the conference. And Halsey now was in constant communication with the officials here.

"Then what is happening?" I demanded. "Where are the girls? Has Halsey heard from them?"

Again Grantline went to a nearby room.

"Anita sent a message," he said when he returned. "They are with Molo. An indefinite message; but Halsey is ordering a squad of men to be ready."

Grantline swiftly sketched for us what had happened in the Red Spark. Anita and Venza, flaunting a simulated drunkenness with a skill for acting which I knew both of them possessed, had joined that drunken party. Perhaps if Meka had been there, she would have seen through them.

BUT Molo did not. And they have since told me that the Martian was himself far from sober, although he was probably not aware that the drink was affecting him. Whatever his emotions—and in the light of what subsequently occurred I can guess at how he felt toward Venza—he yielded to their demands to leave the restaurant with him. He wanted, as we know, most desperately to leave unobtrusively. And Venza threatened a drunken scene unless she could go.

He took them, leaving openly in a public fare-car. Doubtless he at first intended to de-rail them somewhere and proceed secretly to his lair. But they convinced him that he was not followed. Twice he used his detector, and Anita and Halsey were clever enough to throw off their rays in time to avoid it.

Then Halsey lost connection with the fleeing car, and after that Molo doubtless changed his mind. His association with these two supposedly drunken and wholly attractive young women amounted to an abduction.

These, we can only guess, were his motives for acting as he did. And we know that his sister showed immediate disapproval of his rashness.

"But where are they now?" I demanded of Grantline. "Good God, we can't let them—"

"You," said Grantline sternly, "are out of it. Do you think that

Halsey—under Brayley's orders, now—will neglect any chance to find out where Molo is hiding? He and these brains—you saw one of them die just now rather than tell the secret—they're planning something. You heard, from the insulated room of the Red Spark, that shrouded figure say that his master thought it would be to-night. Something is about to happen. This conference is wrestling with it. In Grebbar and Ferrok-Shahn they're striving to find out what it is. Something impending now! The Martians and Venus people, like us, realize that. The helios are pouring in here from Venus and Mars. They're mobilizing their space-flyers, just as we are."

GRANTLINE at last was letting out all his apprehensions upon us, with this burst. "Something nameless, hideous. You've only been touching the surface, like the general public, which must be protected from panic. Halsey didn't tell you that the entire resources of his organization are out upon this thing to-night. Here at the conclave there's a room of information-sorters. That's just where I came from a moment ago. Every country on our Earth is making ready—for what, nobody knows! Halsey and all his force are on the alert—for what? It's ghastly, not knowing what you're fighting. Halsey let that Martian woman and the hooded stranger get away. He thought he could pick them up again, but he hasn't.

"He's had two fragmentary calls from Anita. He has a hundred men ready to rush to their aid, and to capture Molo's lair. He expects another message from Anita any moment. This conference here knows every movement that is being made, within ten or twenty seconds of its making. Perhaps upon Anita and Venza the whole outcome of this thing may hang, and you and Snap rail because you love them and they are in danger!"

We had no answer to that. We could only stare at him.

"But see here," I stammered, "who is this Molo? Halsey didn't tell us."

"He told us nothing," said Snap. "Nothing that he could avoid. You'd think we were damn children."

"You've been acting like it. Molo is an interplanetary pirate. The *Star-Streak*—"

"Good Lord!"

WE had heard of him indeed! For five years past, a mysterious gray space-flyer, with a base supposedly hidden in the Polar deserts of Mars, had been terrorizing interplanetary shipping. Many of the smaller freighters between the worlds had mysteriously vanished, captured and destroyed by the *Star-Streak*, as the pirate ship was called.

"They think," Grantline went on, "that Molo was cruising with his pirate ship. He has, as you know, a band of criminals drawn from all the three worlds; supposedly about fifty of them, commanded by himself and his sister. We think that Molo and his pirate flyer—last month, probably—encountered the three flyers which this new planet sent out. The *Star-Streak* was captured; perhaps destroyed. And Molo and his band, themselves outlaws, enemies to our three worlds, joined with this new enemy. To save themselves—and because they have been promised greater rewards."

"But why would these brains want them, want their help?" Snap demanded.

"This is all theory, probabilities only. Wouldn't you say it was because, in Ferrok-Shahn, Grebbar, and here in Great-New York, simultaneously to-night, something has to be accomplished? Something the brains themselves could not do. [illegible] and his band know all three [illegible] How they landed here in [illegible]-New York nobody knows. The enemy space-ship is 200,000 miles out. Obviously they came from it—landed secretly with some smaller vehicle somewhere on Earth and made their way here. And when whatever it is they're expecting to do is accomplished, they'll try to escape by the same method. But, by the gods, if we have our way—"

A buzzer hissed beside us. A microscopic voice commanded:

"Grantline, bring Gregg Haljan and Daniel Dean to room six at once. Mr. Brayley wants them now."

In room six we stood before the War Secretary, who had arrived there a moment ahead of us.

"Ah, Haljan—and Dean. I'm glad to see you."

HE was still white and shaken. Beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. He mopped them off.

"I've just had a—rather terrible experience." He did not suggest that we sit down. He went on crisply:

"Grantline has no doubt told you some of the things which are upon us to-night?"

"I have," said Grantline.

"Quite so. Disturbing, terrifying things. . . . Haljan, in a word, there is an enemy ship out in space. God knows of what character; we don't. It is at this moment seemingly poised visually not over twelve degrees from the Moon. The observatory at Tokyohama reports that they can see it plainly with the solarscope. We have a ship, Haljan, being rushed into commission tonight. You know her—the *Cometara.*"

"I know her," I said

"Quite so. She is taking flight, as soon after dawn as we can make her ready. She will carry about fifty men. The armament and men are in charge of Grantline. You, Dean, we want to handle her radiohelio."

"Thank you," said Snap.

"And you, Haljan—we can think of no one better fitted to navigate her."

He waved away my words of appreciation. "Within another day we shall have thirty such ships in space. Mars and Venus also are mobilizing. God know we hope it will prove unnecessary. This first ship may perhaps meet the enemy; conquer it."

BUT there was no conviction in his voice. He stood up. "We feel, Haljan, that if anyone can handle the *Cometara* with skill enough to combat this lurking enemy, it will be you."

"I will do my best, sir."

"We know that. The ship is leaving from the Tappan Interplanetary Stage as soon after dawn as possible. When have you and Dean last slept?"

Snap and I gazed at each other. "Last night," we both said.

"Quite so. Then you need sleep now. I want you to go at once to the Tappan Interplanetary Fieldhouse. The Commander there will give you a room, supper and make you comfortable. Eat, and sleep if you can. We want you to keep out of this night's activities here in the city. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," I agreed.

"We want you refreshed for what may come upon the *Cometara*. That more than anything, is vital." An orderly was approaching behind Brayley. "I'm coming back in a moment, Rollins." Brayley smiled wanly. "So much at once—it leaves one confused."

He shook hands with us. "I may

not see you again until it's over. Good luck, lads. Grantline, they need you for a moment in the hall; something about electronic space-gun equipment for the *Cometara*. Then you'd better go to Tappan House also, and get some sleep."

We were dismissed. Snap and I regarded each other hesitantly. I said impulsively:

"Mr. Brayley, Detective-Colonel Halsey is using two girls to-night—"

"Yes, we're watching that, Haljan."

"They are the girls we are to marry," I added. "May we communicate with Colonel Halsey?"

"Yes. Call him from here." He smiled his tired smile. "But keep out of it, you lads. Remember, we need you at dawn."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

He took Grantline with him and left us alone in the little room.

"Well," burst out Snap, "that's that. If I go up to Tappan before Venza and Anita are safe, I'm a motor-oiler."

"Same here. But Snap, we've got to be there by dawn, or soon after."

THE Tappan departure-stage was only a few miles up the Hudson, across the Tappan-Zee from the Westchester residential district. We could get there in half an hour.

It was now nearly trinight, or halfway between midnight and dawn. There was no audiphone connection in this small room. We did not want to leave it and talk from an audiophone in some other room.

"Not me," said Snap. "When I go out of here, I go with a rush. If we poke our heads out there now somebody'll grab us, route us up to Tappan with a guard. Set up your speaker, Gregg. You can get him."

I had my portable audiphone, to use sound connection only. For local distances about the city it was dependable. In a minute or two Halsey accepted my call.

"You, Gregg?"

"Yes. We're at the conclave. They're through with us. Where is Anita? Oh, Colonel Halsey, please—"

"We've heard from her. Twice. Some time ago, Gregg. Just fragments; it's all I can tell you. I'm expecting—"

We could hear someone interrupting him. Then he came back. "Gregg? I was saying, Molo took them somewhere. He had his detector commissioned; I didn't dare fling after them—Anita warned me not to try it. She had to stop connection herself. God knows how she has been able to whisper to me at all."

HIS voice, like Brayley's, had the ring of a man almost confused, mentally strained to the breaking point. I could appreciate how Halsey must feel. In his youth a man of physical action, forced now almost always to remain at his central desk, with his encircling banks of instruments; holding all the network of his far-flung activities centralized; his voice, his decisions and commands, in a hundred places almost simultaneously—while his body sat there inactive at his desk.

"Gregg, it's all I can tell you. I have men strewn about the city. When the clue comes, I'll send them in force. The girls must have arrived at Molo's place by now, watching their chance to communicate. If only they know where they are, so that they can tell me. . . . Gregg, I must disconnect—"

"Colonel Halsey—Anita's frequency — the wave-combination — give me that! Maybe Snap and I can pick up the message when it comes and not disturb you any more."

He named the oscillating frequency of the instrument Anita was using. Then he disconnected.

"But can you pick up that frequency?" Snap demanded anxiously.

"Yes, I think so."

"Then come on. We'll try it as we go."

"Go where?"

It faced us down. We were longing for action. There was no place to go! Nothing we could think of to do!

"The hell; sit here then," said Snap. "Try that frequency. We've got to do something. If she'll only send us a hint!"

The room's door-slide suddenly opened, and an orderly appeared before us.

"Haljan?"

"Get the hell away!" roared Snap. "We've had our orders; we don't want any from you!"

"Gregg Haljan and Daniel Dean are paged on the mirrors," the orderly said mildly.

Someone in the city wanted us; our names were appearing on the various mirror-grids, publicly displayed throughout the city in the hope that we would answer.

"That's different," said Snap. "Answer it for us, that's a good fellow. Say we're too damn busy."

"It must be important," the orderly insisted. "The caller registered a fee at the Search Bureau; that's how they located you here. He paid the highest fee to search you. An impending danger emergency call—"

"That is different," I exclaimed. It was against the law to invoke the services of the Search Bureau unless based upon actual impending danger. Such a call at once enlisted the services of Halsey's organization.

"We'll take it," I told the orderly.

"Come with me, sir." He turned and left swiftly.

WE hastened with him to a corridor cubby. Upon the audiphone there I was at once connected with a voice, and an anxious man's face, with a two-day growth upon it.

"Haljan! Thank God you answer. This is Dud Ardley. Me and Shac are here. Listen, this is the lower cellar corridor, Lateral 3, under Broadway Street. For God's sake don't get it mixed. Me and Shac just have seen your girls down here."

News of Anita and Venza! I could see in the mirror-image, behind Dud's head, the outlines of the little public cubby from which he was calling. He and his brother had been traversing this deserted lowest cellar corridor of East Side lower Manhattan, upon some illicit errand of their own. They had seen figures alighting from a fare-car. By instinct, the brothers Ardley were always furtive. They had crouched and watched, and had caught a glimpse of the faces of Venza and Anita. The girls were hooded and cloaked. A hooded man was with them. The fare-car quickly rolled away, and the hooded figures, suddenly becoming invisible within their magnetic cloaks, had vanished.

"S'elp me, we couldn't do nothin'. We ain't armed, Gregg—you know we take no chances with the police by carryin' cylinders. So I paged you in a hurry."

"Dud, that's damn nice of you. Where are you now? Tell me again."

The Ardleys, knowing nothing of the events of this night, supposed that the girls were being abducted, or were perhaps upon some escapade about which Snap and I should be informed.

"Damn right, Dud. We'll come at once. You two wait for us?"

"Sure. If you got instruments, maybe we can track 'em. It wasn't a quarter of a mile from here—

over toward the river. Plenty of rotten dumps down there."

The cellar tenements of the city, where all the scum of its population gathered! I knew that many criminal Martians and Venus people lived in that disreputable shambles.

"Wait for us, Dud. We'll come in a rush."

I slammed up the audiphone. Snap, beside me, had heard it all. He shoved the astonished orderly out of our way.

"What's the nearest exit-route out of here? Hurry up, you!"

"To the city roof, sir, up this incline, and—"

We dashed up the spiral incline, through a low exit-porte, and were in the starlight of the city roof.

CHAPTER VI

The Screaming Light-Beam

"CONNECT it, Gregg! You can't tell—her message might come over any minute."

I tuned the receiving coils of the little portable audiphone to the seldom used oscillation frequency which Halsey had told us Anita's transmitter was sending.

"Anything, Gregg?"

"No. Dead channel."

The air, in Anita's channel, was so bafflingly silent!

Snap was rushing us, in a small official tram-car, along one of the south-bound roof-tracks. We had been almost immediately challenged by a roof-guard when we appeared from the upper porte of the Conclave Hall; the city roof was not open to public traffic. But our well-known names, and a glib, half-true story of the recent interview with Brayley, calmed the guard's ire. He let us pass; he even found us a single-seat hand-tram, and started us southward on the deserted shining rails.

It was a cloudless night, with stars like thickly strewn diamonds on purple velvet. The city roof lay glistening in the starlight. In my great-grandfather's time there had been almost no roof here; an open city, exposed to all the inclement weather. But gradually the arcades and overhead viaducts, cross balconies and catwalks which spanned the canyon street between the giant buildings became a roof. It spread, now terraced and sloped to top the lofty buildings, like a great rumpled sheet propped by the knees of sleeping giants. Some of the roof was of opaque alumite—dark patches, alternating with the great glassite panes which in places admitted the daylight.

OUR little single-motor tram sped southward upon the narrow, paralleled rails which wound their way over the terraces. Save for the guards and lookouts in their occasional cubbies, and the air-traffic directors in their towers, we were alone up here. The roof was tangled with air-pipes, line-wire conduits, ether-wave aerials—arterial systems of the ventilating and lighting devices. As far as one could see the ventilators stood fronting the night breeze like little listening ears. There were water tanks; great cross-bulkheads and flumes to handle the rain and snow. A few traffic towers maintained order in the overhead air-lanes. Their beacons stood up like swords into the sky when the passing lights marked the thinly-strewn trinight traffic.

We were stopped at intervals, but in each case were passed promptly.

"Nothing yet, Gregg?"

"No."

Anita's channel remained so horribly silent. It was, I suppose, no more than ten minutes during which we sped south along the grotesque maze of the roof; but to us it was an eternity of horrible imaginings. The girls were down in the shambles of the East Side city cellar. If only some message would come! . . .

"I'll pull up here."

"Yes," I said.

I gathered up my little audiphone, thrust it under my dark flowing cloak. If only our cloaks were magnetic! But they were not.

We leaped from our car; abandoned it on a siding.

"In a rush, Haljan?" said the guard.

"That's us. Orders from Mr. Brayley."

We left him and plunged into a descending automatic lift. A drop of a thousand feet; we shot downward past all the deserted levels, past the ground-level, the undersurface tramways, the sub-river tubes, the sub-cellar—down to the very bottom of the city.

"Come on, Gregg. Two segments from here."

WE advanced almost at a run. At this hour of the night hardly a pedestrian was in evidence. It was an arched, vaulted corridor, almost a tunnel, dimly blue-lit with short lengths of fluorescent tubes at intervals on the ceiling. For all the vaunted mechanisms of our time, the air here was heavy and fetid. Moisture dripped from the concrete roof. It lay on the metal pavement of the ground; the smell of it was dank, tomb-like.

There were frequent cross-tunnels. We turned eastward into one of them. For a segment there were the lower entrances to the cellars of the giant buildings overhead. We passed a place where the tunnel-corridor widened into a great underground plaza. The sewerage and wire-pipes lay like tangled pythons on its floor. Half across it, by the glow of temporary lights strung on a cable, a group of repairmen were working. We passed them, headed in to where the tunnel narrowed again and there were now occasional cubby entrances to underground dwellings.

It was a rabbit warren from here to the river. A disreputable shambles, haunted by criminals and by miserable families, many of whom never saw the daylight for weeks at a time. The very air was sodden. The giant voice of the city hardly carried down here, so that an oppressive silence hung upon everything—as though death were silently stalking here, with only our hastening footfalls on the metal grid of the pavement echoing through the stillness. The few pedestrians whom we passed were furtive as ourselves.

"That next crossing, Gregg—they said they'd wait for us. But I don't see them."

Occasional escalators led upward; the overhead traffic—most of it at this hour concerned with the city's incoming food and milk supply—sounded as a vague rumble. In advance of us was a narrow intersection. A giant pipe, one of the main arteries of the vacuum-tube postal-transit system, hung above the corridor intersection. There were a few lights in the bullseyes of the subterranean dwelling rooms, but most of them were dark.

"Easy, Snap! Not so fast."

A PREMONITION of evil, of something wrong here, suddenly swept me. I pulled Snap to a walk. We edged over against the tunnel side. We had passed a small, lighted audiphone cubby—evidently the one from which Shac and Dud had paged us. They should have been here waiting; but there was nothing save the empty, gloomy tunnels. . . .

"Something is coming!" Snap clutched at me. We drew our cloaks around us and waited in a shadowed recess. Down a side incline, a segment behind us, a small automatic food truck came lurching. It pulled up at an arcade entrance—doubtless some food-shop serving the dwellings of this area. Its driver slid the portals, deposited his cases of food, locked the panel after him; and in a moment he and his truck were gone back up the incline.

We heard, in the ensuing silence, a low groan! Someone moaning near at hand. It sent a chill over me. It seemed quite close to us. Then abruptly it stopped. We saw, within twenty feet of us, two dark figures lying on the pavement grid in a black patch of shadow where the mail-tube came down in a curve and disappeared into the tunnel wall.

We bent over the figures of two men. They lay together, one half upon the other—black-garbed figures with white, staring faces. One twitched a little and then lay still.

They were Shac and Dud Ardley!

"Murdered, Gregg! Good Lord!"

BOTH were dead. But we could see no marks upon either of them. Something had killed them, as they waited here for us.

I found my wits. "Snap! We can't stand like this—wholly visible!"

It seemed suddenly that there must be invisible enemies lurking here. Things, strange beings, watching us, preparing to strike with hidden death, as they had struck at Shac and Dud.

I pulled Snap away. We darted a few feet. The light of the tunnel intersection was directly over us.

"Not here, Snap. Run!"

A panic was on us. Like animals, terrified at the light, we plunged away, seeking darkness.

Under the curving vacuum tube a little further along we found shelter. Snap murmured:

"The girls were past here. But which way, Gregg? Which way?"

As though I knew!

I felt at that moment, under my shirt against the skin of my chest, the annode of my audiphone receiver tingling! A receiving signal! Anita's channel was not dead. In the gloom I could see Snap's white face as he watched me hastily bringing it out.

"A call, Gregg?"

"Yes, I think so!"

"Hurry, oh hurry!"

We heard a tiny microphonic voice—Anita's voice.

"Colonel Halsey! Yes, I have the location. Lafayette 4—East corridor, lowest level. There was a descending entrance; I don't know the number. Don't you speak again! I've only a minute! Venza safe—but send help! Something we don't understand—a strange mechanism here. Molo is—"

Then Halsey's interrupting voice. "Anita, escape! You and Venza!"

"We can't! They've got us!"

"I'm sending men—they'll be there in ten minutes! If you—"

"Ten minutes! Oh, that will be too late! Molo is—"

It seemed that we heard her scream. The waves blurred and died, but in my horrified ears her microphonic scream was ringing.

THE channel was dead. Had Molo discovered her? Lafayette 4—East corridor, lowest level. A descending entrance. . . .

"Snap, that's here! As near here as we could place it! A descending entrance!"

We stood backed against the great curving side of the postal vacuum tube. Within it I heard the hiss and clank as a mail cylinder flashed past, grinding around the curve. Halsey's orders must be going out now. His men nearest this place would come in a rush. Ten minutes, and they would be here. But Anita said that would be too late!

Snap and I were frantically

searching. Somewhere here was a hidden descending entrance, leading to Molo's lair. It seemed in the silence that Anita's scream over that audiphone was still ringing in my head. Had it been entirely from the instrument? Or were we so close that in actuality we had heard its distant echoes?

"Gregg, help me!"

Snap was tugging at what seemed a horizontal door-slide, like a trap in the tunnel floor, partly under the vacuum-tube.

"The damn thing—stuck."

No! It yielded with our efforts. It slid aside. Steps led downward into blackness. We plunged in. Caution was gone from us. The steps went down twenty or thirty feet; we were in another smaller corridor. It was vaguely lighted by a glow from somewhere. Then, as my pupils expanded further, I could see this was a shabby alley street, opening ahead into a winding passage with the slide-porte above us like its back gate. A shambling warren of cubbies was here; a little sequestered segment of disreputable dwellings.

We stood peering, listening.

"Shall I try the eavesdropper, Gregg? Take only a minute to connect."

"Yes. No, wait!"

I thought I heard distant sounds.

"Voices, Snap! Listen!"

More than voices! A thud, footsteps running! A commotion, back in this metal shambles, within a hundred feet of us.

"This way," I murmured.

WE plunged into a black gash. There was a glow of light—a glassite pane in a house wall nearby. The commotion was louder. And under it now we heard a vague humming: something electrical. It was an indescribably weird sound, like nothing I had ever heard before.

Snap clutched at me. "In here—but where is the accursed door?"

There was a glassite pane, but we could find, at first, no door. In our hands we held small electronic bolt-cylinders—short-range weapons—but they were all we had.

The hum and hissing was louder. It seemed to throb within us, as though its tiny ultra-rapid vibration were communicating to every fiber of our bodies.

No door; then we rushed to the glassite pane. Snap drew back his fist as though he would smash his weapon into the glassite.

"You can't break it! Too thick!"

Light was streaming through it now. We glimpsed the interior of a room. The place a few moments before must have been dark. The light now came from a strange mechanism set in the center of the metal cubby. I caught only an instant's glimpse of it—a round thing of coils and wires. The metal floor of the room was cut away, exposing the gray rock of Manhattan Island. And against the rock, in a ten-foot circle, a series of discs were contacted, with wires leading from them to the central coils.

The whole was humming, hissing and glowing with a weird opalescent light. It was dazzling, blinding. Within it the goggled figure of Molo was moving, adjusting the contacts. He stooped. He straightened, drew back from the light.

Only an instant's glimpse; but we saw the girls, crouching with black bandages on their eyes. Meka, goggled like her brother, was holding them. A tall shape carrying a round black box darted through the light and ran. Molo leaped for the girls. Perhaps he shouted; the hum had mounted to a wild electrical scream. Molo flung his sister and the girls back out of the light.

They all vanished. There was nothing but the light, and the mounting, dynamic scream.

BESIDE me, Snap was pounding on the glassite panel. I joined him. We raged, baffled. But it was all only a moment. I was suddenly aware that my senses were reeling. I was pounding mechanically, in a vague, mechanical, hopeless frenzy. Everything was dream-like, blurring as though unconsciousness were upon me.

Where was Snap? Gone? Then I saw him nearby. He had found a door, but it wouldn't yield. Perhaps he thought he saw another door; his shout was lost in that screaming din, but I saw his arm go up in a gesture to me. He ran.

I found myself running after him, but I stumbled and fell. Then over me the scream burst into a great roar of sound. It seemed so intense, so gigantic a sound that it must ring around the world.

And the light burst with an exploding puff. The black metal cubby walls seemed to melt like phantoms in a dream. A titan's blow torch, the opalescent light shot upward, a circular ten-foot beam, eating its way through all the city levels as though they were paper, up through the city roof.

Molo's cubby was gone. His mechanism was eaten by the light and destroyed. There was only this motionless, upstanding beam, contacted here with the Earth, streaming like an opalescent sword into the starry sky!

CHAPTER VII

Three Swords Crossing in the Sky

I MUST paint now upon a broader canvas to depict the utter chaos of this most memorable night in the history of the Earth, Venus and Mars.

From that point in the bowels of Great-New York, near the southern tip of Manhattan Island, the mysterious light-beam shot up. It screamed with its weird electrical voice for an hour, so penetrating a sound that it was heard with the unaided ears as far away as Philadelphia. A screaming titan voice it was, shrill as if with triumph. There were millions of people awakened by it this night; awakened and struck with a chill of fear at this nameless siren shrilling its note of danger. The sound gradually subsided; it seemed to reach its peak within a few minutes of the appearance of the light, and within an hour it had ceased.

But the light-beam remained. Those who inspected it closely have given a clear description of its aspect. But to this day its real nature has never been determined.

It was a circular beam of about a ten-foot diameter. In color it was vaguely opalescent; rather more brilliant at night than in the daytime, though with the coming of the sun strangely it did not fade, but remained clearly visible, with a spectrum sheen when the sunlight hit it so that it had somewhat the appearance of a titanic, straightened rainbow.

From that contact point with our Earth, the inexplicable beam stood vertically upward. It ate a vertical hole like a chimney up through all the city levels, through the roof, and above that it streamed unimpeded into the sky. It had a tremendous heat, communicable by contact so that it melted the city above it with a clean round hole. But the heat was non-radiant.

I was found lying within fifty feet of the base of the beam. There had been an explosion, so that Molo's metal room was gone; but I had fallen beyond its destructive area, and from where I lay there was only a warmth to be felt from the light.

Halsey's men found me within half an hour. I was unconscious, but not injured. I think now that the sound and not the light overcame me. I presently recovered consciousness; for another hour I was blind and deaf, but that quickly wore off. They rushed me through the chaos of the city to the Tappan Interplanetary Headquarters. Grantline was there, but not Snap. I sent them back, when once I was fully conscious. They searched all the vicinity at the base of the light. Snap, alive or dead, was not to be found.

ANITA and Venza were gone. Not dead—I could not think that, for I had seen Molo and Meka plunge away with them as the light-beam burst forth. They were gone, and Snap was gone. My emotion at the loss, and my own inability now to do anything about it, was distracted by the rush of events.

There was, by now, a turmoil unprecedented throughout all the metropolitan area. The motionless light-beam itself had done little damage. There was the ten-foot burned hole of its upward passage, but of material damage, nothing more.

But its appearance brought instant chaos. Within a radius of five miles of its base, the city was plunged into darkness. All power was cut off. Lights were out. Every vehicle, tram, tube-train—the aeros passing overhead—the city ventilating systems—all ceased. Audiphones were wrecked; every coil and fuse-wire, the ignition systems of all the myriad devices, were rendered inoperative. Why, no scientist even now can clearly say. It was not, they claim, any unknown ray-aura from the light. They think now it was the vibrations from the sound. Whatever its physical nature, that sound was like nothing ever heard before on Earth. It subsided within an hour; and after that, lights and motors brought into the darkened area were not affected.

But during that hour, within the stricken area, there must have been scenes most horrible. Grantline and I, up the Hudson in the distant suburban section, sat and listened to the incoming reports of what was transpiring. South Manhattan was in a black panic of death. A multitude of terrified people awakened in the night to find blackness and that screaming sound. The black streets and corridors and traffic levels were jammed with panic-stricken throngs trying to escape, trampling and killing each other in their terror.

THIS was in the stricken area; but everywhere else the panic was spreading. Transportation systems were almost all out of commission. The panic spread until by dawn there was a wild exodus of refugees jamming the bridges and viaducts, streaming from all the city exits into the suburban districts.

This was Great-New York. But it was only one of three cities. Grantline and I, that dawn in Tappan, got only a confused summary of the interplanetary helios. From Venus and Mars came reports of similar chaos. In Grebbar; and in Ferrok-Shahn—doubtless almost simultaneously with Great-New York—similar light-beams appeared.

"But what can it be?" I demanded of Grantline. "Something Molo contacted there? He did it—that was what he was working for—and he accomplished his purpose. But what will the beam do to us?"

"It's doing plenty," said Grantline grimly.

"But he didn't intend that. Something else—"

But what? As yet, no one knew. I had already told the authorities what I had seen of Molo's mechanism. Snap, Venza and Anita were vanished; I was the only eye-witness to Molo's activities; and heaven knows I had had but a brief, confused glimpse.

Obviously Molo had come to Earth with these weird beings from the new planet; had come to Great-New York to establish a contact with the Earth and create this light-beam. The mechanism he had planted down there on the naked rock of Manhattan Island brought the beam into being—and destroyed the mechanism.

THE beam remained. It streamed upward from the rock. They thought, this night, that the rock atoms might be disintegrating; that Molo's strange current had set up a disintegration of the atoms, and that electronic particles from them were streaming into space.

The light-beam seemed impervious to attack. Within a few hours the authorities were attacking its base with various vibrations, but without apparent success.

From where Grantline and I sat in an upper balcony doorway of the Tappan Headquarters, we could see the giant beam standing over the city far to the south. It was now just before dawn, a clear, starry, moonless night. The eastern stars were paling. To the south, above the metal ramparts of the giant city, the now silent beam mounted into space. Very strangely, even at this distance, it was as clear as though we were close to it. I tried to follow it with my gaze, into the sky. How far did it extend? It seemed, up there, like a narrow radiance of glowing star-dust; the straightened tail of a comet. A million miles, or a hundred million? No one could do more than guess.

The dawn was coming, but the beam-radiance remained unaffected.

"Gregg, look there at Venus!"

To the east of us there was a distant line of metal structures surmounting the mid-Westchester hills. To us, they formed the horizon-line; and above them in the brightening sky of dawn Venus was just rising. Mars had already set at our longitude. Venus, fairly close to the Earth now, was the "Morning Star," visually at a narrow angle from the Sun and rising just before dawn. Telescopically it was a giant narrow crescent; but with the naked eye it was a brilliant blue-white star. It mounted now above that line of metal stages in the distance.

And as Grantline gestured, I saw from Venus the same sword-like beam streaming off almost to cross our own.

Grantline and I, with a mutual thought, ran around the balcony and gazed toward where Mars had set. A narrow radiance was streaming up among the stars off there.

THREE swinging swords of light in the sky! With the rotation of the planets, they swept the firmament. The mysterious enemy had planted them—but why? What was to happen next? Within Grantline and me—and countless millions on Earth, Mars and Venus felt the same—there came an infinite dread, a horror unnamable.

What was coming next?

And as though to answer us, from far to the south, over mid-Jersey, came a new manifestation. We saw a speck rising: a distant mounting speck of something dark, with streamers of tiny radiance flowing from it.

"A space-vehicle, Gregg!"

It seemed so. It came slowly from above the maze of distant structures, gathered speed, and in a moment was in the upper air—then through it like a rocket, and gone to our sight.

But others, better equipped, had observed it. It was a cylindrical projectile, with stream-fluorescence propelling it upward. It was some unusual form of space-vehicle. Telescopically it was seen until well after dawn, speeding out in the direction of the Moon.

Molo and his weird allies escaping! Grantline and I had that thought, and afterward it was proven the truth. With their work done here on Earth, they were escaping into space to rejoin the hovering enemy ship 200,000 miles out.

I stood gripping Grantline on that little balcony and gazed with sinking heart. Were Anita and Venza prisoners on that mounting enemy vehicle? Would I ever see them again? And Snap—had Molo perhaps dashed out from his metal cubby just as the light was bursting and come upon Snap? Was Snap on this rising projectile-cylinder? With all my heart I could only hope that he might be there, uninjured, with the girls, so that he might lend them the protection I had failed to give.

"Haljan and Grantline wanted below."

The voice of a mechanic on the balcony behind us roused us from our thoughts. We went down through the busy building, Grantline steadying me, for I was still shaken from my experience.

THE workshops of the Tappan Interplanetary Headquarters had for hours been ringing with busy activity, which Grantline and I had ignored. The *Cometara* rested upon her departure stage outside, with a score of workmen conditioning her. Grantline and I were to command her; but the efficiency of the organization kept us out of all activity until the start, so that we might rest.

Rest, indeed!

We were plunged now into the actual departure. The *Cometara's* newly installed armament was aboard, ready to be assembled after the start. The men to handle it were embarked. My half-dozen officers and the ten members of the crew I had already briefly met. They were aboard now, waiting for me.

"On we go, Gregg. Let's wish ourselves luck!"

From grim, silent abstraction, Johnny Grantline had now sprung into his familiar dynamic self—so like Snap!

There was a solemn group of officials and a hundred or so workmen here, gathered to speed us off and wish us luck. No gaily applauded departure, this rising of the *Cometara!* The faces around me were white and haggard.

They stopped their fevered labors now for a moment to see the *Cometara* get away, first of Earth's ships speeding into space to confront this nameless enemy. No one was in the mood for applause. Grantline and I went past them silently, with silent handshakes and murmured good-byes. I saw the towering figure of Brayley. He raised an arm for a farewell gesture to us, and turned away as though overcome by emotion.

WE mounted the incline to the *Cometara.* She rested upon her stage, a great, sleek bronze ship, low and rakish, with pointed ends and a flattened arched turtleback dome of glassite covering the superstructure and the decks from bow to stern. She lay quiescent, gleaming in the glow of the departure beacons; but there was an aspect of latent power upon her; an eagerness to get away, as though impatiently she waited there for me to come and speed her into action.

My ship! My first command! Upon such a mission I was destined now to take my first command! As we went through the opened porte of the dome-side and I touched foot upon the deck, I prayed that I might justify the faith reposed in me.

Men crowded the narrow covered deck. I saw the electronic space-guns at the deck pressure-portes, partly assembled. My chief officer—a young fellow named Drac Davidson, who with his twin brother had been in the Interplanetary Freight Service—rushed up to me.

"We are ready, sir."

"Very good, Drac."

He hurried me to the turret control room. Grantline instantly had plunged into details of assembling the weapons.

"Her portes are all closed," said Drac. He spoke calmly, but his thin face was pale and his dark eyes glowed with excitement. "The interior pressure is set at 15 pounds. You can ring us up at once."

No formalities to this departure! With pounding heart I entered the small circular turret and mounted its tiny spiral stairs to the upper control room. But as I touched the levers, all the excitement dropped away.

A calmness came to me—an absorption with these familiar tasks at which I was skilled.

I slid a central-hull gravity-plate. It went smoothly, perfectly operated by the magnets. The vessel trembled, lifted; outside the enclosing dome I could see the dawnlight of the sky and the paling floodlights of the stage. Figures of men out there, with silent gestures of farewell, dropping slowly beneath our hull as we lifted.

THE bow gravity-plates slid into the repulsive-force positions. The bow lifted. The *Cometara* responded very smoothly to my will. We went up, poised at a forty-five degree angle. I saw the outer beacons on the stage swing upward with their warning to passing traffic in the lower lanes.

"Light our bow-beacon, Drac."

We lifted through the lower, thousand and two thousand-foot lanes. The lights of Tappan were dwindling beneath us. The interior of the *Cometara* was humming with the whirr of its circulators and air-receivers, mingled with the throb of the interior-air pressure pumps. At three thousand feet I started the air-rocket engines. They came on with a gentle purring. The fluorescence from them streamed along our hull and down past the stern, like twin rocket tails.

With gathering speed we slid smoothly upward through all the highest traffic lanes; out of the atmosphere, through the stratosphere and into space.

Leaving the stratosphere, I cut off the air-rocket engines, slid the stern gravity-plates for the Earth's repulsion and the bow plates for the attraction of the Moon and Sun. The firmament swung in a slow arc, and steadied with the Earth behind us and the Sun and Moon in advance of our bow. We were on our course, plunging through space with accelerating velocity toward the unknown enemy ship hovering two hundred thousand miles ahead of us. My orders were to find the ship and maneuver us close to it; and Grantline's orders were to assail it. If only we could have seen ahead a few hours, to what awaited us.

I gazed down at the convex North Atlantic with the reddening coastline of North America spread like a map. Great-New York was down there in the chaos of panic. The safety of three worlds, perhaps, depended upon the outcome of our encounter.

But what was the nature of this strange enemy? That opalescent beam from Great-New York was now so horribly apparent, mounting with its radiance into the domelike starfield! And the one from Venus and the other from Mars seemed crossing overhead amid the stars.

Three swords crossing in the sky! What did they mean?

(To be continued.)

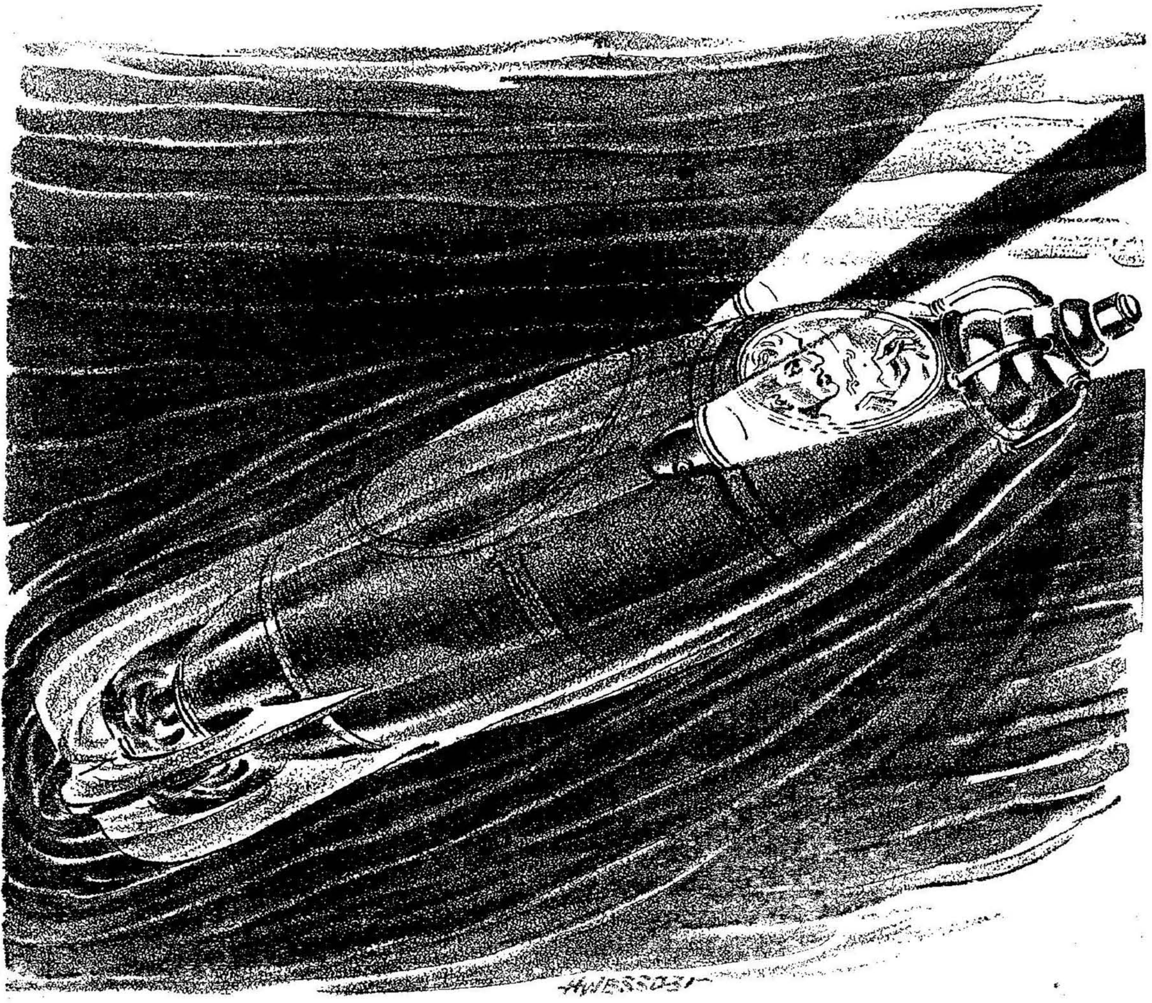
Seed of the Arctic Ice

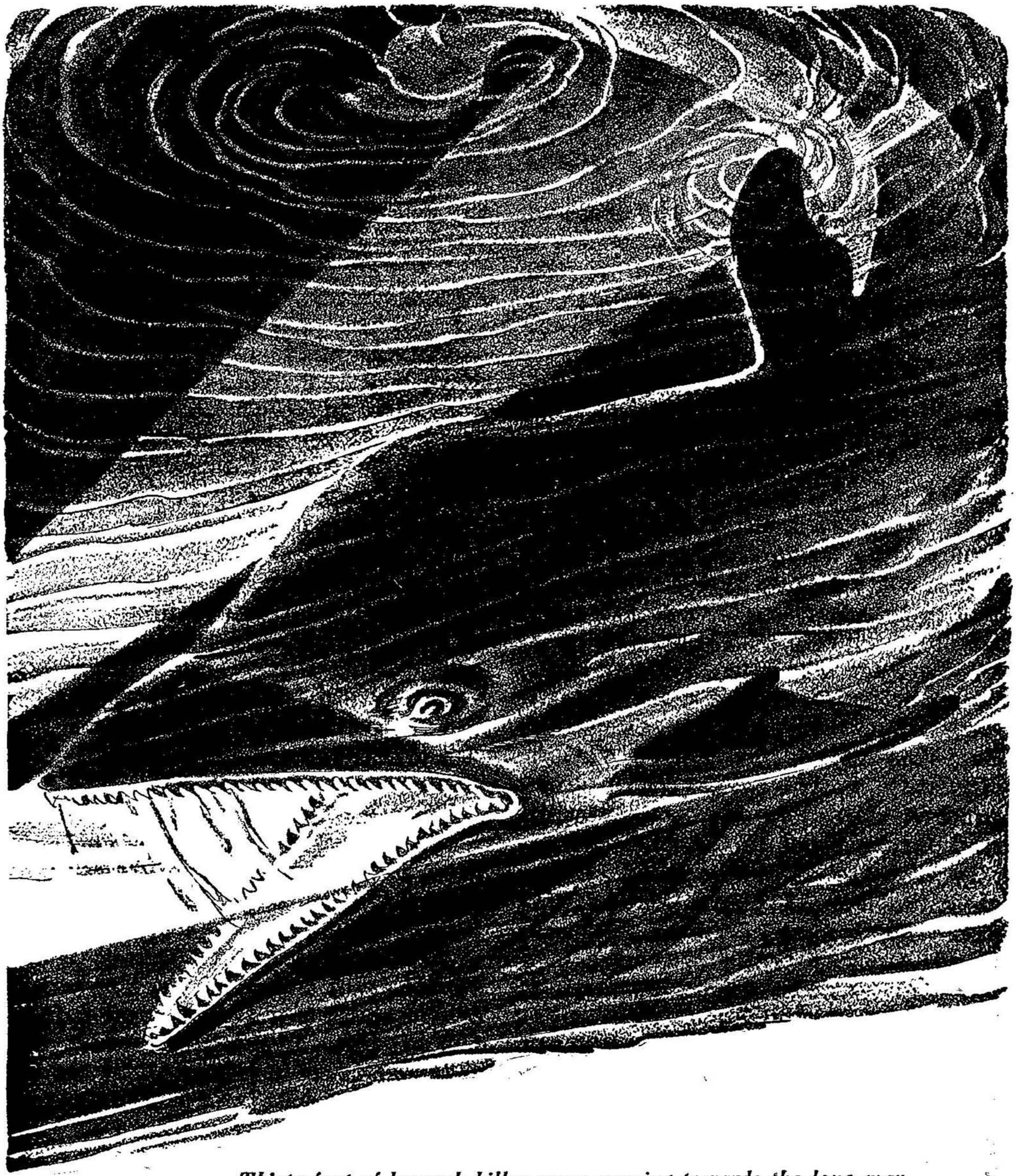
By H. G. Winter

Killer whales and seal-creatures tangle Ken Torrance in an amazing adventure under the ice-roofed arctic sea.

SLEEPILY the lookout stared at the scope-screen before him, wishing for something that would break the monotony of the scene it pictured: the schools of ghostly fish fleeting by, the occasional shafts of pale sunlight filtering down through breaks in the ice-floes above, the long snaky ropes of underwater growth. None of this was conducive to wakefulness; nor did the half-speed drone of the electric engines aft and the snores of some distant sleeper help him. The four other men on duty in the submarine—the helmsman; the second mate, whose watch it was; the quartermaster and the second engineer—might not have been present, so motionless and silent were they.

The lookout man stifled another yawn and glanced at a clock to see how much more time remained of his trick. Then suddenly something on the screen brought him to alert attention. He blinked at it; stared hard—and thrilled.





Thirty feet of berserk killer came curving towards the lone man.

Far ahead, caught for an instant by the submarine *Narwhal's* light-beams, a number of sleek bodies moved through the foggy murk, with a flash of white bellies and an easy graceful thrust of flukes.

The watcher's hands cupped his mouth; he turned and sang out:

"K-i-i-ll-ers! I see killers!"

The cry rang in every corner, and immediately there was a feverish response. Rubbing their eyes, men appeared as if from nowhere and jumped to posts; with a clang, the telegraph under the second mate's hand went over to full speed; Captain Streight rolled heavily out of his bunk, flipped his feet mechanically into sea-boots and came stamping forward. First Torpooner Kenneth Torrance, as he sat up and stretched, heard the usual crisp question:

"Where away?"

"Five points off sta'b'd bow, sir; quarter-mile away; swimming slow."

"How large a school?"

"Couldn't say, sir. Looks around a dozen."

"Whew!" whistled Ken Torrance. "That's a strike!" He pulled on a sweater and strode forward to the scope-screen to see for himself, even as Captain Streight, all at once testy with eagerness, bawled:

"Sta'b'd five! Torpoon ready, Mister Torrance! Mister Torr— oh, here you are. Take a look."

NEVER in the two years of experience which had brought him to the important post of first torpooner had Ken failed to thrill at the sight which now met his eyes. Directly ahead, now that the *Narwhal's* bow was turned in pursuit, but veering slowly to port, swam a pack of the twenty to thirty-foot dolphins which are called "killer whales," their bodies so close-pressed that they seemed to be an undulating wave of black, occasionally sliced with white as the fluke-thrusts brought their bellies into view. Their speed through the shadowed, gloomy water was equal to the submarine's; when alarmed, it would almost double.

"Three more of 'em will fill our tanks," grunted Streight, his chunky face almost glowing. He bit on a plug of tobacco, his eyes never moving from the screen. "Now, if only we hadn't lost Beddoes. . . . Y' think you can bag three, Mister Torrance?"

"Well, if three'll fill our tanks—sure!" grinned Ken.

The other's eyebrows twitched suddenly. "They're speeding up!" he shouted, and then: "That torpoon ready, there? Good." His voice lowered again as Ken pulled his belt a notch tighter and snatched a last glimpse of the fish before leaving. "I want you to try for three, son," he said soberly; "but—be careful. Don't take fool chances, and keep alert. Remember Beddoes."

Ken nodded and walked to the torpoon catapult, hearing Streight's familiar send-off echoed by the men of the crew who were nearby:

"Good hunting!"

THE idea of an underwater craft for the pursuit of killer whales—tremendously valuable since the discovery of valuable medicinal qualities in their oil—had been scoffed at by the majority of the Alaska Whaling Company's officials at the time of its suggestion, but the *Narwhal* after her first two months of service had decisively proved her worth. She was not restricted to the open seas, now swept almost clean of the highly prized killers; she could follow them to their last refuge, right beneath the floe-edges of the Arctic Circle; and as a result she could bring back more oil than any four surface whalers.

With a cruising radius of twenty-five hundred miles, she stayed out from the base until her torpoons had accounted for anywhere from sixty to eighty killers. One by one these sea-animals would be taken to the surface and there cut up and boiled down, until her tanks were full of the precious blubber oil. Ever farther she pressed in her quest for the fish schools, dipping for leagues into a silent sea that for ages had been known only to the whale and the seal and their kindred; a sea always dark and mysterious beneath its sheath of ice.

The inner catapult door closed behind Kenneth Torrance, and he slid into his torpoon. Twelve feet long, and resembling in miniature a dirigible, was this weapon that made practical an underwater whaling craft. The tapered stern bore long directional rudders, which curved round the squat high-speed propeller; its smooth flanks of burnished steel were marked only by the lines of the entrance port, which the torpooner now drew tight and locked. Twin eyes of light-beam projectors were set in the bow, which was cut also by a vision-plate of fused quartz and the nitro-shell gun's tube, successor to the gun-cast harpoon.

Ken lay full-length in the padded body compartment, his feet resting on the controlling bars of the directional planes, hands on the torpoon's engine levers. A harness was buckled all around him, to keep him in place. His gray eyes, level and sober, peered through the vision-plate at the outer catapult door.

Suddenly a spot of red light glowed in it; the door quivered, swung out. A black tide swirled into the chamber. There came the hiss of released air-pressure, and the slim undersea steed rocketed out into the exterior gloom, her light-beams flashing on and propeller settling into a blur of speed as she was flung.

KEN turned on her full twenty-four knots, zoomed above the dark bulk of the slower mother ship, whose light-beams flashed across him for a second, and then straightened out in a long, slight-angled dive after the great black bodies ahead.

Aware that some strange enemy was on their track, the killers had become panicky and were darting away at their full speed, which was only slightly under that of the torpoon's humming motors, and which at times even surpassed it. Ken saw that it looked like a long chase, and settled his lean body as comfortably as he could.

His mind was not concentrated on the task ahead, for the first part was mere routine and he could follow his quarry almost mechanically. And so, as his steel shell drove through the ever-shadowed, icy sea, he began to think about the disappearance of Chan Beddoes, the *Narwhal's* second torpooner.

Dead, now Beddoes; it was a week since he had set out on the chase from which he had never returned. Ken could only conjecture as to what had stricken him down. There were countless possibilities: perhaps a blow from a dying killer whale's flukes bursting his torpoon's seams; perhaps a crash into underwater ice. Whatever it was, it had been sudden, for not even a faint radioed S.O.S. had trembled into the earphones of the *Narwhal's* radio-man. For two days they had held hopes that the second torpooner still lived, as the sea-suit stored in each torp contained air-units sufficient for thirty-six hours. But a whole week's passing told them that that vast stretch of glacial sea was now Chan Beddoes' grave.

Ken's reflections brought an urge to get the present job over with as quickly as possible. He squeezed another ounce of speed from the torpoon, taxing it to the limit and setting up a slight vibration; then he fondled the nitro-shell gun's trigger and studied the huge fish bodies ahead.

"Seems as if they're going to run forever," he muttered indignantly. "We'll be to the Pole if they keep it up!"

ALREADY the *Narwhal* was miles behind. Through the torp's vision-plate a scene of ever increasing mystery and gloom met his gaze. The killers' course had brought them beneath a wide sheet of ice, apparently, for there were no more columns of pale sunlight piercing through. The quarter-light monotone was unbroken, save by deeper drifts of shadow, and as he drummed through it the torpooner wondered at its lifelessness. He discerned no more of the ghostly fish-schools that usually abounded. Some enemy possibly had driven them from the region; but not the whale he was pursuing, for they scorned such fare.

He was scanning the surrounding murk apprehensively, when, of a sudden, his brain and body tensed.

Off to one side, far to the right, he thought he had glimpsed a figure. It was hanging motionless, level with him; and at first it looked like a seal. But the flippers seemed longer than a seal's; moreover, no seal would be anywhere near a pack of killer whales; nor did they poise in an upright position. It couldn't be a seal, he told himself. What, then? Was it only imagination that made it appear faintly human-shaped?

He strove to catch it again with staring eyes, but it was gone, leaving only a jumbled impression of something fantastic in his mind, and the next instant the whole thing was forgotten in the movements of the killer school, now only a few hundred yards ahead.

They suddenly began a great sweeping curve to the right, a typical maneuver before standing for attack or breaking up. At once Ken swerved to starboard and drove the torpoon's nose for an advance point on the circle the fish were describing. His move swallowed the distance between them; the sleek, thick-blubbered bodies swept close by his vision-plate, their rush tossing the torp slightly. Twelve of them went past in a blur, and then came the thirteenth, the invariable straggler of a school. The thin lightbeams pencilled through the darkness, outlining the rushing black shape; Ken gripped the gun's trigger and jockeyed the torp up a trifle in the seconds remaining, always keeping the sights dead set on the vital spot twelve inches behind the whale's little eye.

WHEN only fifteen feet separated them he squeezed the trigger and at once zoomed up and away to get clear of the killer's start of pain and, if the shot were true, its following death flurry.

The shell slid deep into the rich outer blubber; and, wheeling, Ken watched the mighty mammal quiver in its forward rush. This was merely the reaction from the pain of the shell's entrance; the nitro had not as yet exploded.

Now it did. The projectiles carried but a small charge, in order not to rip too much the buoyant lungs and so cause the body to sink, but the killer trembled like a jelly from the shock. The heart was reached; its razor-sharp flukes thrashing and tooth-lined jaws clicking, the killer wheeled with incredible speed in its death flurry. A minute later the body shuddered a last time, then drifted slowly over, showing the white belly. It began a gentle rise up toward the ceiling of ice.

"One!" grinned Ken Torrance. He noted his position on the torpoon's dials and gave it to the *Narwhal* by radio. They would then follow and pick up the whale.

"I'll have the second in ten minutes," he promised confidently. "Signing off!"

Again the torp darted after its prey.

He found it easy, this time, to overhaul them. Not many minutes had elapsed before he again caught sight of their rhythmically thrusting flukes and the flash of white undersides. Unaware that one of their fellows had been left a lifeless carcass by the steel fish again nearing them, they had reduced their speed somewhat.

Ken angled down a hundred feet into the deeper shadows, not wanting to apprise them of his presence. He continued at that level until the belly of the rearmost whale rolled white above him; then he veered off to the left, rising as he did so, in order to bring his assault to bear directly on the killer's flanks.

He swung back and streaked in for the kill. It looked like an easy one.

But he was never more mistaken

in his life. For, as luck had it, he had chosen a tartar, a fighting fish—literally the "killer" which its kind had been named.

THE torpooner knew what he was in for as soon as he fired his first shell. Its aim was bad, and instead of sinking into the flesh it merely ripped across the whale's back, leaving a ragged, ugly scar.

An ordinary whale would have been scared into panic by the wound and doubled its speed in an effort to get away; but Ken Torrance saw this one wheel its six-foot snout around viciously until its beady little eyes settled on the torpoon.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered. "He's turning to fight. All right, come ahead!"

He veered about and fired another shot that missed its mark by feet, but creased the whale's flukes. At once this terrible weapon lashed titanically up and down, and thirty feet of berserk killer came curving towards the lone man inside his shell of steel. Ken tensed himself for combat. He would have to keep a good distance from the fish and fire until he got it, as a square smash from its flukes might crumple the torp like an egg-shell.

But his foe gave him no chance. Crazy with pain and anger, it swept up and nipped his dive for the bottom with a fluke-blow that tumbled the torpoon over and dazed its pilot. Before he could get straightened out it was on him again, catching him up into a wild whirlpool, butting the shell and flashing round to get its flukes into position. With a wrench, Ken jammed the rudder over, shoved his accelerator flat and got free just as the tail thrashed down. He was breathing hard and sweating as he banked around—to see once more the whale, its wicked jaws wide open, charging directly at him.

For a moment he was unable to move. Such a mode of attack was totally unexpected, and the sight held him fascinated. He could see the very wrinkles of the monster's skin as it rushed in, with shadowy flukes thrusting behind; could see the lines of dagger-like teeth, the cavernous maw and gullet. And then all vision was blotted out as the jaws closed around the torpoon's nose.

Ken did not wait for those jaws to crunch shut. He gripped the nitro-shell gun's trigger and squeezed it back.

The weapon hissed, flung its shell. He reversed his engines to try and tear free. Seconds dragged by with no result. Then he felt a mighty jolt; his harness broke; and he was pitched into the torp's engine controls.

That was all he knew, save for a vague feeling of falling, falling over and over, which was ended when a second bone-shaking shock brought complete oblivion. . . .

IT was darkness that met his eyes when they opened, the eery darkness of the floor of the Polar Sea.

Darkness! Half-conscious as he was, he started in surprise. He looked for the torp's shaded control board-lights, but could not find them. Bewildered, he wondered what had happened, and then remembered the whale. In its flurry it had smashed him down.

Pain was thumping his forehead where he had struck the control levers; with a groan he twisted his body around and felt for his hand-flash. At any rate, there was no water inside the body compartment. The seams had resisted the blow. But why were there no lights?

He found his hand-flash, and its beam showed him the reason. Playing it on the small water-tight door which separated the main compartment from that in which the machinery was contained, he looked through its fused quartz peep-hole. He gaped in consternation.

There was, after all, a leak in the torpoon's shell, and a bad one. The machinery compartment was full of water.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "That means no light, no radio—no power! Guess I'm stranded!"

He considered the situation. It was not serious, for he had been in touch with the *Narwhal* after bagging the first whale and had given his position. The submarine would proceed to the kill immediately; then, after a while, not hearing from him, they would scour the neighborhood, just as they had hunted for Chan Beddoes when he did not return.

But they'd find him, Ken told himself—and soon. He had no idea how long he had lain unconscious, but probably by now the mother ship had already hooked onto the first whale; maybe she was already hunting for him.

"Well, I'd better get out and be ready to signal to 'em with the flash," he reflected. "They may miss me here in the mud."

TAKING his sea-suit from a long narrow locker, he drew the stiff-woven fabric over his body, turned the air-units on, clamped the face-shield shut, and then, gripping his hand-flash, slowly opened the port in the shell's side.

A weird figure he was, fit for the mysterious gloom into which he came. With casque of steel and lead-weighted feet, staring face-shield and metal belt, and equipped with a knife and two or three emergency tools, the sea-suit transformed him into a clumsy, grotesque giant. He sloshed into the muddy sea bottom, stumbling at first from the heavy water resistance and hardly able to see anything. The torpoon itself was a hazy blur at a short distance, but up above the light was better, being almost bright next to the ice ceiling. He adjusted the air pressure inside his suit, floating his feet off the bottom. A few clumsy armstrokes and he went drifting gently upward.

Knowing that the "bends"—bubbles of air in a diver's veins—come from too rapidly changing pressures when rising, he made his ascent carefully. Up twenty feet, then a pause; twenty feet more and another pause. So he rose some ninety feet, and finally arrived at the underside of the ice floe.

Here he found the water a pale blue-green, increasing, at the limit of his vision, to impenetrable black. Nearby was a great dark blur which he recognized as the killer whale that had struck him down. It bobbed lifelessly against the smooth, light ceiling of ice. Slowly, he swam over towards it.

There was no mark of the havoc his last shot must have wreaked inside. He examined the body with interest, fingering the two inch-long teeth, which even the mighty sperm whale fears and flees from.

"Pretty wicked," he said aloud, just for the companionship of his voice. "And there's a lot of oil in this brute. Streight'll be glad to get him. Maybe he won't need a third to fill the tanks."

Thought of his captain made him look up and around, hoping to see the *Narwhal's* light-beams come threading through the distant murk. He did not see them, but what he did see caused his mouth to drop open, and his veins to chill with a cold that was not that of the sea nor the ice above.

"Good Lord!" he whispered. "That thing—again!"

Like a specter from the deep, some hundred feet away was a form, seal-like in appearance, yet not wholly seal. It poised there motionless, apparently looking straight at him.

FEAR came over Ken as he studied it. Its body was perhaps ten feet long, and sleek and fat under a brown-colored hide. But its flippers were not those of a seal; they were too long and slender, especially the hind ones. They unquestionably bore a remote resemblance to human arms and legs.

"Yet it can't be anything but some kind of seal," Ken whispered to himself. "It must be!"

But then, too, it did not have the ordinary seal's bullet head, set squat between smoothly tapering shoulders, but rather something bulbous, half like that of a man, in spite of the layers of fat that stream-lined from it to the broad shoulders. It did have, however, two large, staring eyes, and slitted holes inches below them for nostrils—which showed that it breathed air and was therefore warm-blooded.

Quite motionless, each stared at the other, while minutes passed. Then the creature moved slowly up and forward, impelled by a graceful and hardly perceptible roll of its queer flippers. Very gradually it came towards Kenneth Torrance; and he, peering with fear-tinged curiosity at the animal's bold advance, saw two creases of fat that must have been lips slide open in the smooth brown face, baring strong, pointed teeth.

Not knowing whether it was an attack or merely inquisitiveness, he unsheathed his knife. At this the figure stopped and poised motionless again, perhaps fifty feet away, and after a moment turned its sleek head first to the left and then to the right. Automatically, Ken gazed around likewise. He drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

Like shadows, additional figures had appeared in the distant murk. Silently they had come; he could see eleven—twelve—even more. He was surrounded! No longer doubting their purpose, he gripped his knife firmly. He knew he could never get down to the torpoon in time.

And then the circle began to close.

THERE was little he could do to resist them, he realized, for what he had seen of their movements told him that they were swift, effortless swimmers. But he braced himself as best he could against the dead whale, to protect his back. He would at least go down fighting.

As their spectral shapes slid slowly closer he noted something that had escaped his eyes before. Four or five of them were holding dim objects in their arm-like flippers. Spears, he made them out to be, rudely fashioned from bone. And others held dark-colored loops, which they were slowly forming into nooses.

"They're intelligent, all right," Ken muttered. "Spears—of whalebone, I guess. And ropes—probably seaweed. Weapons! Good Lord, what kind of seals are these?"

Easily, gracefully, the silent circle drew in to perhaps twenty feet of him, where they paused again, hanging motionless at regular intervals in the eery, wavering half-light. Ken licked his lips nervously. Then the one whom he had seen first moved its head slightly, in what was apparently a signal. And in a concerted movement, so bewilderingly rapid that his eyes could not hold them, they rushed him.

He had expected speed, but not speed such as this. He had barely swung his knife-arm up when the wave engulfed him.

Doubling, curving shapes looped around him; blubbery bodies pressed against him; eyes flashed by in streaks of brown; he knew that he was being tumbled and tossed and that his knife and hand-flash had fallen under the shock of the attack. And then there was a sharper sensation. As he struggled to break free, taut cords trussed his legs and arms like any captive animal's.

The stream of moving bodies slowed in movement and fell back from a breathless, dazed Kenneth

Torrance. He then got his first clear view since the assault was unleashed.

He was upright, many feet away from the killer whale's carcass, his arms bound strongly to his sides with seaweed-rope, his legs locked close together. To one side he glimpsed several of the creatures fastening other rope strands to the whale's flukes. When they had finished, with smoothly thrusting flippers they began to haul the carcass forward, and he felt himself move feet first in the same direction.

He forced a wry smile to his lips. "A swell fight I put up!" he grunted. "Hold 'em off! Yeah—I bet I held 'em for a full tenth of a second."

HE still could hardly believe what had so rapidly befallen him. It was difficult to credit eyes that showed him creatures whose bodies were mainly seal-like, and yet whose weapons and coördinated movements spoke for human intelligence. But they were certainly real. At his feet he could feel the pressure of a guard's flippers against him.

He was towed in this fashion for some distance when the pressure of the flippers suddenly tightened and he was pulled into a deep-angled swoop toward the sea-bottom below. Previously he had seen his captors' amazing speed, but now he felt it. Down and down he went, and at last, when it seemed he must crash into the sea floor, his momentum was quickly checked, and he found himself standing in the mud, from which position, lacking support from his guard, he drifted to a horizontal one, face up. And there, lying helpless on the bottom, he saw the reason for the sudden dive. Far to the right, piercing faintly through the murk, were two faint interweaving beams of white that preceded a slowly moving dark bulk.

The *Narwhal!* Wild hopes of rescue coursed through him.

Dimly, as he watched the beams, he was aware of the rest of the creatures dropping down, guiding between them the whale's carcass. Then a firm pressure was applied to his side, and he was rolled over, face down in the mud. Unable any longer to see his ship, his momentary vision of rescue vanished.

"Hopeless, I guess," he muttered despairingly. The darkness on the sea-floor was too thick, the wavering shadows too deceptive. And his hand-flash and knife were gone—probably knocked from his grasp during the struggle, [illegible] thought.

He realized that the seal-like animals were lying low until the submarine passed, its size having awed them. The color of the bodies blended perfectly with the gloom, as did that of his own sea-suit. His bonds prevented him from making even the slightest movement to attract attention.

Torturing thoughts raced through the torpooner's brain. He saw, in his mind's eye, straight above, a hazy bulk, with shimmering columns of white angling from its nose. His imagination pictured for him the warm, well-lit interior, and the bunks—the coffee steaming on the fire, the men at their posts and Streight's anxious, beefy face. He saw it all as plainly as if he were inside, cracking jokes with one of the engineers.

THE minutes passed. The *Narwhal* must now be gone. Ken's cheek muscles stood out as he pressed his teeth together. "Well, go on!" he exploded in impotent rage. "What are you waiting for? Kill me! Eat me if you're going to!" And he cursed the silent forms around him till his ears hurt from the reverberation.

After the *Narwhal* had vanished in the gloom, the torpooner's captors lifted him from the bottom and propelled him leisurely forward again, the slight, graceful roll of their flippers slipping them along smoothly.

A dull hopelessness came over him. No longer could he hope that his submarine would find him. Only one thing was certain, and that was that death would soon come. For even if his captors did not kill him at once, he had but thirty-six hours before his air-units would be exhausted. Certainly, having captured him, the seal-creatures would not release him. And it was too much to expect them to realize that his sea-unit was only an artificial covering which enabled him to live underwater, and not his own flesh and blood.

And as for the chance of breaking loose—the idea was laughable. His speed was snail-like in comparison with theirs. Even if he did manage somehow to get away, what good would it do? How could he, a puny, helpless mite, ever hope to locate the *Narwhal* in this vast sweep of Arctic sea? His torpoon was wrecked, and he had no means of communication.

His situation was quite hopeless.

FAR ahead, a dark shape grew in the foggy murk, and as they neared, spread upwards and outwards. They angled up and up; the sea-floor was higher there. Ken, peering as best he could, made out that the mountainous, looming bulk was the face of a giant underwater mound, whose uneven formation indicated that it was the result of some long-past upheaval. It was the first of a rolling series of such hillocks, six or seven in all, stretching back into the gloom. Their rounded peaks reached to within a few feet of the water's ice-sheathed surface. Surely the creatures' home was among these mounds.

He was skirted round the base of the first hillock and caught a glimpse of something in its face which was apparently of his captors' construction. It was a hole, dark, mysterious, perhaps fifteen feet in diameter, and barring it were three great gray stakes, reaching from top to bottom. Behind the stakes, Ken got a jumbled impression of a body, large and sleek, of black streaked with white, that moved restlessly back and forth in the hole and occasionally seemed to lash out in anger. He wondered what it was. Before long, he knew.

The party of seal-creatures stopped before the second of the row of hillocks. In its face, too, was a hole—a well of blackness—but with no stakes across it. He twisted his head back and saw the carcass of the killer whale he had slain being guided up to the entrance and shoved through. Then, from the upper rim of the hole, three stakes similar to the others he had seen slid down and barred it.

"Storehouses!" he muttered. "Storehouses, I'll bet anything. And killer whales are their food. They keep 'em in the holes until they're needed. But I'll swear it was a live whale I saw in the first one—and how in the dickens could they capture a mighty killer with their dinky spears and ropes?"

There he had to leave the question, for its answer implied greater intelligence in the creatures than he would admit.

Intelligence—in seals!

And now he was guided smoothly forward to the third hillock, where the leaders of the group glided through a V-shaped cleft in its face. His guards brought him along behind.

A wry smile twisted Kenneth Torrance's lips. To him, the cleft was more than an entranceway. To him it signified the beginning of the hopeless, lonely end of his life. . . .

THE cleft led into a corridor, and the corridor was softly illuminated with a peculiar light whose source he could not discover. It served to show him a passageway that was wide rather than tall, and gouged from the firm, clayey soil by blunt tools that had left uneven marks. Straight ahead, it led, and, as they continued, the mysterious illumination brightened, until suddenly, rounding a turn, its source appeared.

Like will-o'-the-wisps, a score of arrows of light flashed softly into view down the corridor. They were of delicate green and orange and yellow, glowing and luminous, and hovering like humming birds between floor and ceiling. Ken looked at them in some alarm until his nearer approach showed him what they were, and then he exclaimed in amazement:

"Why—they're fish! Living electric bulbs!"

A school of slender, ten-inch fish they were, each one a radiant, shimmering, lacey-finned gem of orange or green or yellow. In concert they shot to the ceiling over the party of seal-creatures, who still swam impassively ahead, paying no attention to them, and from there scattered in quick darts in all directions, showering the cortege with washes of spectral luminosity. Then the corridor crooked again, and with one simultaneous movement they were gone. And the scene that lay revealed before Kenneth Torrance took his breath from him.

In the passageway he had seen a score of the living jewels; now he beheld hundreds. He peered up at a shimmering sheet of brilliance, composed of hundreds of the slender refulgent fish, all swimming in slow rotation. Below them was a large cavern, which he guessed had been created by hollowing out one of the underwater hillocks. The sides were rounded, and pitted with holes that represented other passageways, showing dark against the luminosity from above. And streaming out from these dark holes of corridors came dozens of the seal-creatures, gathering in response to some unheard, unseen signal that had called them to witness the strange captive their fellows had brought in. . . .

KEN'S guards gripped him more firmly and he was guided forward and downward to the smooth black floor of soil.

Scores of large, placid eyes stared at him from the slowly undulating, brown-skinned bodies packed close about him. The sight was so weird, so beyond his imagination, that he laughed a little hysterically.

"Dreaming!" he said. "Dreaming! But what a dream!"

Silently, a space cleared in the center of the horde. His bonds were taken away, the guards released his arms and he righted himself and stood there on braced legs, the object of a concerted gaze.

This, the torpooner felt, was the crucial period. Something was about to be decided. If it looked bad he would make a wild—and of course, futile—break for freedom, and die quickly when they punctured his suit. But meanwhile he would stick things out. Anything might happen in that fantastic convocation.

There came a stir in the tiers of brown bodies. An aisle cleared, and down it a single seal-creature glided slowly towards Ken Torrance—undoubtedly the leader of the herd, ruler of the underwater labyrinth.

Gracefully the creature glided up to the lone human, and when only a foot away extended one of its long upper flippers so that its webbed edge rested on his sea-suit's casque. And its placid brown eyes hung close to the face-shield and gazed through inquisitively, intelligently! Intelligently! No longer did Kenneth Torrance doubt that. As he held absolutely motionless under the close-searching scrutiny, his brain rang with the conviction that this creature, this thing of blubbery body and long, webbed flipper-arms and legs—this brown-skinned denizen of the Arctic underseas was, with all its fellows, related to him, a man of the upper world.

Men they were; or, rather, blubber-men!

PREVIOUSLY he had marveled at something suggestively human-like in their appearance; now he recognized human intelligence in his observer's peering brown eyes and questing movements of the flipper over his head casque and suit. Warm red blood flowed in its blubber-sheathed body; an intelligent brain lay in the fat round head. And why not?

Whales, ages ago, were land mammals, animals that walked on the soil of the dim, early world. They had taken to the seas in quest of food, had stayed there and never returned; and Nature had guarded their bodies against the cold and great depths by giving them layer upon layer of oily blubber. The ancestors of these creatures before him might well have lived on the soil, walked and run as he did; then, when the ice came, taken to the sea and made a new home for themselves.

They had enticed the splendent light-fish into their caverns to give illumination. Intelligence almost human. A brain not as highly developed as man's, but a human brain!

Ken Torrance had been almost apathetic toward his eventual fate, but suddenly, now, a great hope came to him—and twin with it, on its heels, came fear. If, or since, this creature inspecting him had an intelligent, human brain, in some way he might be able to correspond with it. He might be able to show that his real body was inside the sea-suit; that he had to have air; that he would die if he were kept underwater, that he could not survive as a prisoner. These creatures appeared to be friendly; seemed to wish him no harm. If he could show them that he was a man of the upper world, they might let him go.

If he could do it! He had to make known to the herd leader that he breathed air, and that he'd die if they didn't release him at once. On that depended life and death.

Ken trembled as he cast about for some way of putting over his idea, and then *the plan came. Smiling* through his face-shield at the brown eyes so close, he drew back slowly and took out a short steel crowbar from the belt at his waist. He bent over and made a line on the soft floor.

ALL eyes watched him; every creature held motionless, apparently interested, eager to understand. Under his suit-clad figure the crowbar traced a rude outline of a man in a sea-suit. The torpooner pointed to the drawing and then fingered his suit, repeating the gesture several times. Then he drew another figure in the soil, this one intended to represent him without the sea-suit. It was not as bulky; the features were sharper and thinner. Ken pointed to the twin dots standing for eyes, then tapped his face-shield; he did this again and again.

For a moment the leader did not move; but then he slid forward and stared through the shield. Rapidly Ken opened and closed his eyes, and pointed again to the dots on the drawing's face.

"Eyes! Eyes!" he said excitedly, voicing the thought his brain was making. "Eyes—inside the suit! The suit's not me; I'm inside! Eyes!" He waited for a reaction, tense and strained. The blubber-man reached out one flipper-arm and took the steel bar from his hand.

A thrill ran through him as the creature dipped its body down and began to draw in the soil. Laboriously, crudely, he outlined another sea-suit, and on the circle representing the face-shield marked two dots—eyes.

"He's getting it!" Ken cried.

The blubber-man went on drawing. He sketched a second suit, similar in all respects, and looked up at the torpooner, inquiringly, it seemed.

Ken nodded rapidly. He tapped the drawings, then his suit; nodded again. "The idea's over!" he told himself. "Now I'll make a move towards that corridor to show them that I want to go, and if—"

But before he could stir, the leader of the blubber-men, with one quick gesture, summoned two creatures from the innermost circle. Swiftly they placed themselves alongside Kenneth Torrance, lifted him and bore him forward, right across the cavern to another of the passageway-entrances.

It was so sudden that for a moment Ken could not think clearly. What had happened? Were they releasing him? Or was he still to be kept a prisoner? No doubt the latter. And he had been so sure that he was communicating with the blubber-man's brain!

His lips pressed tight in a hard white line. It was a tough blow to take.

"Well, that's that," he said. "It was all imagination."

He did not know that his drawings *had* signified something to the leader of the herd—that each had mistaken the meaning of the other. Nor did he have any inkling of the greatest surprise of all that now lay just before him.

THE surprise lay in another cavern.

A quick turn through a cleft-like entrance brought them into it. The room was only a fraction of the size of the central meeting place, and its light, from but several of the light-fish, was dim and vague, barely enabling Ken to see what looked like a pile of rocks in the chamber, heaping upwards. The ceiling was flat and strangely blurred, a rippling veil. As he wondered what caused this, his guards lifted him rapidly towards it, up alongside the rocks.

Not only towards it, but through it! His head-casque pierced through; rivulets of water gurgled off it—and he realized that the blurred veil he had seen was the top plane of the water, which only filled three-quarters of the cavern.

Surprise left him breathless. At first he could see nothing, could only feel that his shoulders were above water. Then he was pushed slowly upward until he rested almost completely above the surface. How did the cavern come to be but part-filled with water? he wondered. And was this dim emptiness around him air? Could he breathe it?

Then he was vaguely aware of a presence on the top of the rock heap. He sensed rather than heard a stir of movement. Then suddenly a ray of light stabbed through the darkness and impinged on his head-casque—white, electric, man-made light!

And there came to his ears, muffled by the suit and distorted by echoes, a call that sounded like his own name!

"Ken! Is it you, Ken?"

Bewildered, he motioned the blinding light to one side. It turned upward and backward, and in its glare a face suddenly appeared out of the darkness.

"Good God!" Kenneth Torrance cried.

It was a pale, drawn face, stubbled with beard, and its eyes were wild. It was the face of Chanley Beddoes, the lost second torpooner of the *Narwhal*.

KEN stared, his body rigid. Chan Beddoes! The dead brought back! So it at first seemed. And here, in a cavern of the blubber-men!

He pulled himself further up on the rock pile, unfastened the clasps on his helmet and took it off—for Beddoes wore none, and that meant the space was filled with breathable air.

"Chan!" he said. "And we were sure you were dead!"

A high-pitched, hysterical voice cried in answer!

"It's you, Ken! They got you too! Oh, but it's good to see you! It's been so lonely, so dark. . . . You are there, Ken? I'm not just dreaming again?"

Ken realized that the other's nerves were shot, and he replied gently:

"You're not dreaming, Chan. I'm here with you now. Steady. Take it easy. Lord, this air—it's pretty foul, but it smells good to me, and it'll save our units. How ever do they get it down here?" He asked the question in hope of steadying Beddoes; giving his mind something definite to occupy it.

A soft ripple sounded just then; looking round, Ken saw that his two guards had slipped back beneath the water, leaving them alone.

Chan Beddoes' helmet was off, but the rest of his body was still clad in a sea-suit. He half squatted on the rocks, his face raised and peering at the first torpooner fearfully, as if afraid he would disappear as suddenly as he had come. The beam of light came from a hand-flash held in his hand. Scattered around were pieces of whitish meat—fish—and the air was sickening with its smell. Ten feet above was the chamber's domed ceiling, from which water kept dripping to the slimy rocks below.

"Air?" repeated Beddoes, stupidly. His mind was obviously affected. "They fetch it from the surface with seal-hide bags, and release it. They change it often. All over the caverns. They have to breathe, too. I think they sleep in rooms like this." His voice rose with hysteria. "Ken, they're seals and yet they're human! Human, down here! They have arms and legs and they breathe air, like whales—and they've kept me here for weeks, years—I don't know! They're devils! It's been so dark and cold and—and—" He began to cough painfully.

"I know," Ken told him sympathetically. "Steady, man. How did you get here? How did they catch you?"

BEDDOES' eyes wandered. He sucked his lips.

"I can't remember," he said. "No. Yes! We left the *Narwhal,* both of us, chasing those killers. They broke up and we went after different ones, and I lost sight of you.

"I chased mine for a long time, and when I fired I only wounded him. He went like hell, and I after him. After half an hour I was ready to give up; I couldn't get close enough. God! Ready to return! To the submarine! To life!"

His voice broke, and he paused until he was able to go on.

"Then I saw another shape ahead of the whale. A queer looking thing—one of these human seals, though I didn't know it then. It seemed to be fleeing from the killer, just as the killer was from me. There was something big and dark ahead—a shadow, I thought, and kept my eyes on the whale. And the next second my torpoon crashed and I was knocked cold.

"It's a deliberate scheme," he went on, at a tangent. "The seal things get a killer chasing them and lead it towards the traps they've got in the sides of these hillocks. They dart in and the whale follows; then bars drop over the entrance and they've got the killer trapped. They eat them."

"But how does the blubber-man get out?" Ken asked.

Beddoes scowled. "Oh, they're clever enough! A passage runs off the trap, big enough for the seal thing, but not for a killer. . . . Well, my torp had gone into the trap and was stuck in one of the walls. When

I came to I reversed my engines full, but I couldn't get free. The impact had ruined my radio.

"Through the after peep-holes I could make out the killer in the trap with me, lashing around like mad. The bars over the entrance were wide-spaced enough to let the torp squeeze through—but I couldn't get loose.

"AS I lay there, wondering what to do, I saw some more of those blubber-men in the corridor raising the bars. They had long spears and knives—and in ten minutes that killer was dead and the place black with its blood.

"Well, I thought I saw my chance. I got into my sea-suit, thinking I maybe could dig the torp free and escape before the damned fish caught me. I climbed out the port and was hacking at the mud bank with my crowbar when a rope slipped over my head and they had me."

Ken nodded. "They got me in the same way," he said.

"And gave you the once-over in the big room," Chan declared. "You'll get plenty more of that."

For most of the man's narrative his tone and manner had been sane enough, but now again he broke out wildly.

"And I've been here for days! Weeks! And nothing but fish to eat, and whale meat, and pieces of ice brought for me to drink, and the darkness and the fish smell! God, it's driven me crazy! I can't stand it any longer, Ken, and I won't. I've got to get out right away or kill myself. I've got to!"

Ken gripped his shoulders and shook. "Steady!" he said sharply. "Get control over yourself!"

"Steady!" Beddoes gasped. "You don't know how long I've kept control! Waiting and hoping, for a chance. One little chance to escape!"

"Why haven't you tried before? Don't they leave you alone here?"

Chanley Beddoes laughed harshly. "Just because you can't see them, you think that? Hell, no! Put on your helmet. Look down—down under the water—and you'll see a guard at the entrance. There's always one there—with a spear. And every now and then he comes up, to see what I'm doing. But no matter: now that you're here we can make a break. You've still got your crowbar: they took mine away. I've only had my flash to work with."

In spite of his awful experience and intolerable predicament, Ken was getting drowsy. He had been through much; he had been short on sleep when he had started out. Nevertheless, he forced himself to consider their situation. Since the blubber-men had kept Chan Beddoes a prisoner, they would no doubt keep him one likewise. It did not mean immediate death from suffocation, for there was air of a kind here; and food was brought. But—imprisonment!

ALL around him was damp darkness; the rocks they lay on were jagged and slime coated them all over and there were little pools of water here and there. Gloom; awful water beneath; slimy rocks to lie on; raw whale meat to eat; stench of rotting fish. Imprisonment! Weeks of this! Suddenly he felt deep admiration for Beddoes in having clung to sanity so long.

"Yes," he said slowly, "we've got to get out. But with that guard on duty. . . . What's your plan?"

The other coughed long, then began:

"It all depends on whether they've moved my torpoon from the trap where it stuck. You didn't see it anywhere? Well, it's got to be still in the trap, and we've got to get to it. It'll carry both of us. The whale that led me into the trap is dead, and we can finish prying the torp loose with your crowbar."

Ken nodded. "But the guard?"

Chanley Beddoes said harshly: "I'm going to kill it!"

Ken looked at him. His pale, drawn face was contorted; his hands clenched and unclenched. He repeated:

"Yes, kill it! I've a score to settle with these devils, anyway. I'll take him unawares. One blow'll do it, if it's placed right. Then, down the corridor and to the trap. I think I remember the way."

Ken thought it out, and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" Beddoes asked.

"We'd better not," he said. "Not yet. And never, if we can help it."

"Why not?" Beddoes cried in great surprise.

"Don't you see? They haven't really harmed us. They're friendly. Yes, they've kept you prisoner and they'll keep me, too—but probably they don't think that's any terrible hardship for us. And they don't realize how much we want to get free."

"What will we do then?" Beddoes broke in impatiently.

"When I see the leader again I've got to get it over that we want to be released. It's a better risk than killing this guard, anyway. They're disposed to be friendly; but if you killed one there'd be the devil to pay." Ken paused, and his eyes closed. He said wearily:

"But I'm dog tired; no sleep for twenty hours. Let me sleep an hour or two; my head'll be much clearer and we'll talk it over."

Chanley Beddoes said nothing. Ken yawned and stretched his body as comfortably as he could on the slime-coated rocks. Dazed from the rush of amazing events his eyelids closed at once, and soon his breathing settled into a regular beat.

PERHAPS half an hour later, a shape moved in the dank gloom of the underwater cavern. The top plane of water rippled softly; little wavelets eddied against the rocks and whispered as the shape slipped down underneath. Then there was silence, no movement; and the water again calmed into a black sheet, smooth as glass. For minutes it stayed so, while Ken's deep, regular breathing stirred the air.

Then suddenly the water's calm was broken. Through its rippling waves the shape reappeared, rivulets streaming from it. Quickly hauling itself up on the rocks, it clambered towards the sleeper. For a moment it paused; then its helmet swung back, revealing Chan's tense, pale face. A hand reached out and gripped the sleeper's arm. A voice called:

"Ken! Wake up! Hurry!"

Even as the words reverberated in the close bowl, the black mirror of water stirred once more. Something pierced through and drifted idly on the surface. It was a large brown-skinned shape, apparently lifeless.

"Ken!" called Chan anxiously again.

The first torpooner stirred. Out of the depths of slumber he mumbled:

"What's the matter?"

"We've got to shove off right now! Quick! Put on your helmet!"

Kenneth Torrance sat up and peered through half-open eyes. He saw before him the face of Chanley Beddoes, wild and excited. In one hand he held the steel crowbar. And behind, on the surface of the water, floated the motionless body of a blubber-man, its head beaten in, streamers of red trailing from it.

Ken said sharply:

"You killed him? After what I told you? You fool!"

"Yes, I killed him!" Beddoes answered brazenly. "What of it?"

Ken said nothing for a moment. Bitter reproach trembled on his tongue, but he did not speak the words, for Chan's mind was all too clearly on the thin line this side of insanity. He only said:

"Well, you've forced the issue, and we've got to leave immediately. It may mean our death, but let's forget it. Now—how much of your air-units is left?"

"About two hours. I lost a lot through a leak."

KEN took half of his own store of the little cells from his helmet. "I'll share mine. That'll give us both sixteen hours all told—in case we don't find your torpoon. You're sure they killed the whale in that trap? And you know the way?"

"I think so," said Beddoes excitedly. "You follow me."

"All right. On helmets, then."

The clasps were fastened down, cutting them off from spoken communication with each other. Ken took the hand-flash and crowbar and stuck them in his own belt, and both clumsy, grotesque figures splashed into the water, vanished beneath its surface and ducked under the shadowy body of the dead blubberman.

Below, in the dim quarter-light, Ken peered out of the entrance to the cell chamber. The corridor seemed safe, there being only the distant colored streaks of light-fish, and occasionally even these disappeared, leaving heaped shadows in the darkened water. He nodded to Beddoes and boldly they began their flight.

Their progress was nerve-rackingly slow, in spite of their utmost exertions. The water that retarded them at times contained unsuspected currents that destroyed their equilibrium and sent them stroking madly with both hands to regain it. Far different, this, than the swift, effortless swimming of the blubber-men. Their weighted feet stumbled often on the floor of the passage, and several times they lost balance and fell towards the sides. Each time that this happened Ken was struck with the fear of ripping the fabric of his sea-suit. And all the time there was the apprehension of imminent discovery.

At last he saw Beddoes wave an arm and enter a dim cleft a few feet ahead in the left side of the wall. In turn he floundered through—and just in time. From around a bend in the corridor shortly ahead there came two blubber-men. In only a few seconds they would pass the niche the two humans had entered. Crowbar ready, Ken flattened himself against the sidewall, pulling his companion back with him. They waited.

THE seal-men passed by—two sleek, blubbery shapes, flipper-arms and legs weaving gracefully, bodies rolling slightly, eyes apparently directed ahead. Close!

They had escaped that time, but there was a disturbing thought in Ken's mind—and in Beddoes' too, perhaps—as they resumed their slow-motion flight down the second corridor. "What if those two were going to visit us in the cell-chamber? Once they see the dead guard, hell sure will start to pop!"

For a period that seemed to be measured in hours they fought their way forward through the retarding pressure of the water. The corridor described a long curve. They were on the last stretch—and still no pursuit!

"If only the torp's there!" Ken kept exclaiming in his thoughts. "Just that!"

"If only the torp's there! . . ." Had they come the right way? He had to trust that to the memory of Beddoes. Beddoes, whose mind had clearly been affected by his seven-day nightmare. . . . He shook his head. He dared not doubt.

They increased their pace a little. Imagination stimulated their weary muscles. The *Narwhal!* Men of their own kind! Sun and air! Life again! Ken could have shouted when he saw his partner stop and gesture excitedly before a dark spot in the wall. It could be nothing but the entrance to a trap.

He pressed forward, flicking on his flash and making sure by the water-waved beam it threw. But Beddoes was attending to some sight down the corridor, and suddenly he pointed in fright. The first torpooner looked in the indicated direction and saw what was meant.

Approaching was a wave of menacing brown-skinned bodies, streaming swiftly through the passage several abreast. Their escape had been discovered. The blubber-men were coming.

AT once Ken acted, pushing Chan into the narrow opening and scrambling after himself. They wormed along for several feet, till they emerged in a large dark chamber at the far end of which was a big circular entrance barred by three great pale stakes. They were certainly in a whale trap.

Rapidly Ken played his flash around, looking for the torp, but it was nowhere visible. To one side was an out-jutting rock with a niche beneath it. It was a promising place and he stumbled his way there, followed by the other.

It was then that a most peculiar feeling came over him, a feeling that was instantly a surge of panic. Something else was in the trap! His flash arced around and up, and what lay revealed in its ray caused cold shivers to run down the backs of the two men.

Above them, just over the three-toothed outer entrance, hung a black, sleek body, white-striped. Head-on it was, and motionless, eyeing them. A killer whale—alive!—and poised for a lunge!

It barred the way to the outer entrance. They could not retrace their steps: already the round brown head of a blubber-man showed in the inner entrance. They were trapped, front and rear, and confronted by the deadliest animal in the sea.

A second they watched it, frozen immobile; then the whale's great body curved and its flukes went up, and by purest instinct the men dove for the niche at their feet. Head to head, they arrived in it, and just in time, for the great jaws of the killer barely missed their snap.

As the monster curved past, the swirling water of its passage nearly dislodged the torpooners, and they made haste to jam themselves into the crevice as tightly as they dared for the safety of their suits.

The whale whipped around in a narrow circle and returned. Its pointed teeth gleamed as it snapped shut its jaws and muzzled its hard, wicked snout into Ken's ribs. Again it circled and streaked for the niche: and, helpless, Kenneth Torrance lay there as the beast tried to slide its head into it. He felt more of the terrifying nuzzling of the snout. But the creature could not dislodge him.

"Can't bring his teeth to bear," he muttered with a certain relief. "Niche isn't high enough. We're safe, I guess, for a couple of minutes. Unless the blubber-men come in and kill him like they did the one Chan followed last week."

FOR several minutes the sea-beast continued its frantic attempt to reach the two humans, and then its attacks became desultory. During one respite Ken managed to get up his flashlight and send its beam out over the floor—and what he discovered was the essence of irony. Directly opposite, on the floor by the wall, lay a familiar long slim shape, its stern tipped by rudder-planes and propeller, its metal flanks gleaming in white ray. The torpoon. And utterly useless—a heartbreaking jest—unless they could reach it.

But a slight hope grew in the men at its discovery. They had come to the right trap, after all. Probably the whale had dislodged the shell from the wall with fluke-blows—possibly, too, the blows had sprung its seams and opened the engine-compartment to water. . . .

Ken occupied himself with the problem of how to get to it. It held their only hope. But with all his racking his brains he could think of no way but to make a rush for it. If he could get inside, the torp, lying flat on the ground, would be reasonably safe from the killer until he could get it running.

Through the face-shields, he met his companion's eyes. The same decision had come to both.

There was a tiny space of muddy floor between them. Kent doused it with light from the flash. In the mud, with a forefinger he slowly traced these words one at a time, rubbing each one out to make room for the next:

"I get torp. Kill whale with gun. Only way. I go. I senior. If fail, you try."

He looked at the other inquiringly. Vigorously, Chanley Beddoes shook his head.

He smoothed over the last word Ken had marked and in its place, in the same fashion, began:

"No. Draw lots. Only fair."

Yes, it was fair, and Ken knew it. He wrote:

"How?"

The second torpooner scrabbled around with his fingers. Presently he unearthed something, and apparently satisfied showed them to Ken. They were two pebbles, of different sizes. Beddoes pointed to the larger. He wrote:

"Large makes attempt."

Again Ken nodded. He marked:

"Other try keep killer's attention."

From time to time a long sleek body slid down to them and edged back and forth, striving its best to dislodge them with its blunt snout. After each failure it would return to a position just over the outer entrance. At the proper moment Chanley Beddoes jumbled the pebbles in his cupped hands and laid two fists down on the mud.

Unhesitatingly, Ken placed a finger on the left one.

Beddoes turned and opened it. It was the smaller pebble.

CLOSE as was his face-shield to Beddoes', Ken could not see what his reaction was. Ken stretched forth his hand and clumsily touched his companion's shoulder.

"Good hunting!" he said; but Chan never heard that. . . .

The marked man peered out into the trap. The killer was circling slowly. In the escape hole, the faces of three or four blubber-men were dimly visible. They seemed to be watching with interest.

There came a good moment when the killer paused at the three bars of its cell, its head turned in exactly the opposite direction from the two torpooners. Beddoes seized the opportunity at once. Almost before Ken knew it, he had rolled out of the niche.

Quickly he worked to his feet and started pushing for his goal. The whale had not seen him. Arms and legs straining, he floundered slowly ahead. He nearly made it.

But the killer, restlessly turning, saw him—and Kenneth Torrance winced and cried out.

The black monster struck. With horrible, beautiful grace it curved down. Its snout caught Chanley Beddoes square in the side and butted him up and around, and both disappeared in a swirl of water into the inky shadows of the trap's ceiling.

Ken closed his eyes. He knew what was happening. He could not move. But it came to him, as he lay there sick with horror, that he would never have a better chance than now, while the killer was occupied.

Recklessly he forced himself out of the niche. Up above there was commotion, a whirlpool of churning water. The current helped him: he got caught in it and was swept sprawling right over to the torpoon's side.

HE clutched at the port, expecting each instant the tear of monster fangs; but he made the interior and clicked shut the port. No matter the water that had come into the main compartment with his entrance. He pulled the starter over, and heard the familiar drone of electric engines, safe inside their watertight division. He felt no relief at this. There was only the same sick horror.

He raised the torpoon a little. There was one thing to do. Perhaps it was mad to try to destroy that killer whale in so narrow a space, but he was going to attempt it. It would not be so bad to join Chan, if he failed. . . .

A terrific blow struck the stern of the torpoon and spun it around dizzily. Ken made out the killer lifting its flukes for a second blow. Quickly he sped the torp ahead, and turned as best he could. Flashing on his powerful bow-beam, he found the killer to his left, slightly above. Carefully he maneuvered into firing position; then coldly, with deadly accuracy, he centered the sights of his nitro-shell gun on the vital spot behind the eyes. He pressed the trigger; again, and yet again. The projectiles hurtled out.

The monster started; its beady eyes settled on the torpoon; with a lunge it darted forward, jaws gaping wide. And as it came another shell sped true into the tooth-rimmed mouth.

It halted then, and doubled in the water. Shook after shock shook the torpoon as the shells exploded in the whale. For a little while the sea-beast flurried, and once or twice the torp shivered from chance fluke-blows. But then at last came peace. The body rolled over, showing its white belly, and drifted towards the trap's ceiling. . . .

The brown-skinned heads had disappeared from the inner entrance. Kenneth Torrance glanced in that direction for a last time, then looked sadly around.

"So long, Chan," he murmured. "So long."

The torpoon squeezed through the bars of the outer entrance and sped forth into the open sea.

SO it was that, perhaps an hour later, the light-beams of the whaling submarine *Narwhal,* doggedly scouring the region where last her first torpooner had been heard from, fell across a slim shape of steel that was beating its way at full speed through the foggy murk of the Arctic sea.

Right up to the *Narwhal* she came, swerving at the last moment and hovering outside the starboard torpoon catapult; while, aboard the submarine, an officer whose voice quivered with excitement roused Captain Henry Streight from his bunk, and the men off duty gathered around the inner catapult entrance-port.

Quickly the outer port swung open. And the lone torpoon slid in—slid home.

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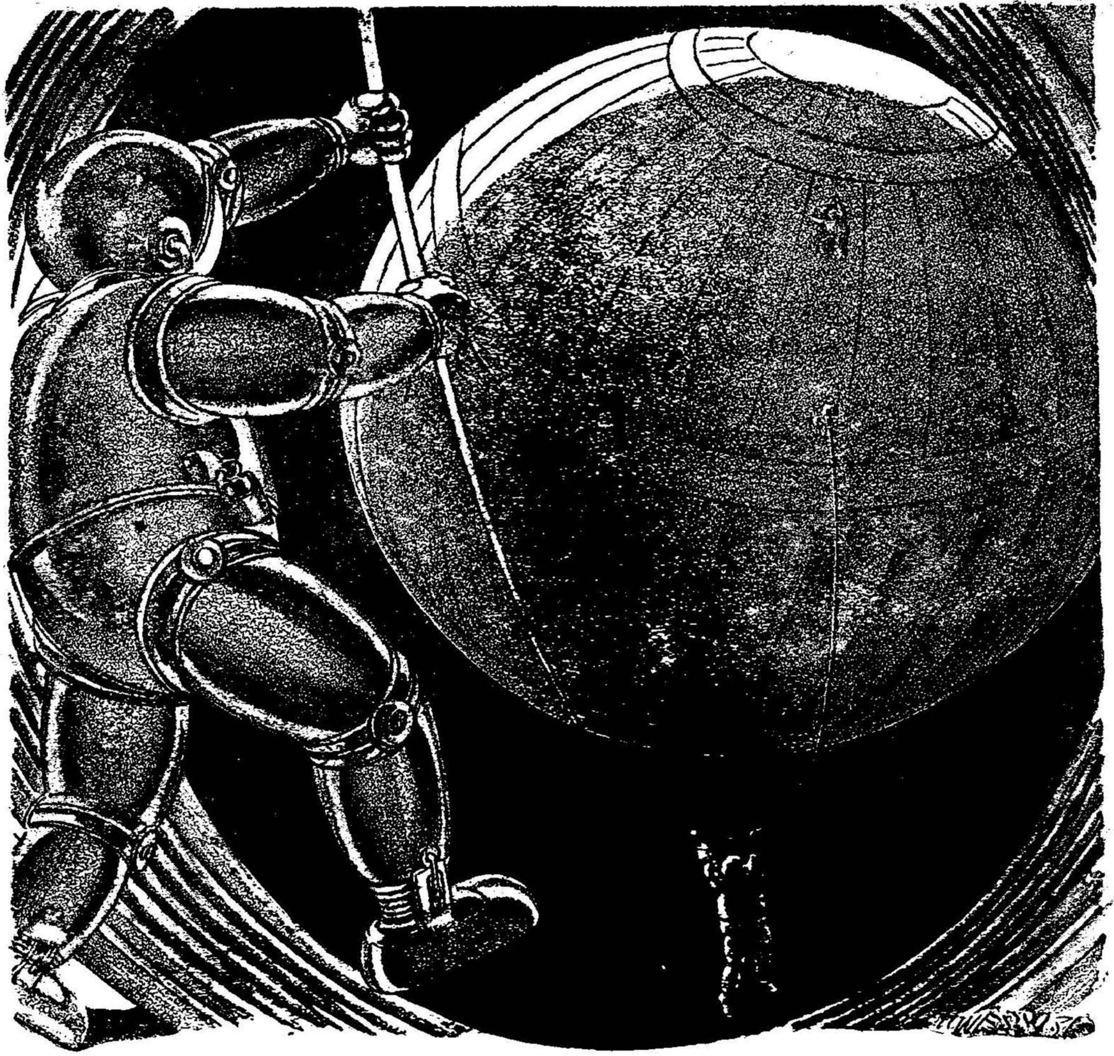


Winford leaped out into space along the cable.

The Space Rover

By Edwin K. Sloat

EVAN WINFORD leaned wearily against the controls of the little space sphere, and stared out of the window at the planet, Mercury, which lay a million miles sunward. Fail now? He gritted his teeth. No! He would wrench victory from Fate after all, even though at this moment mine guards must be searching the nearby mountains for him and his companions, and a warning was being broadcast to all the planets and space ships to watch the little prison tender ship, the one that was used to transfer prisoners from liners out in space to Mercury and its Interplanetary Council prison mines to which all who were sentenced came on one-way

Young Winford heads a desperate escape from the prison mines of Mercury.

tickets only. This was the first time, Winford reflected grimly, that the sphere had ever carried outbound passengers.

A long, quavering wail sounded from the hold below. Winford scowled. That fellow, Agar, again. Too bad, for he was unquestionably an engineering genius and thoroughly dependable when he didn't get one of his spells and imagine he was a godo-dog on the red steppes of his native Mars. A little rest and gentle treatment would unquestionably work wonders. Again the wail, followed this time by a series of growls.

Winford slid open the door that separated the control nest from the hold of the little prison tender ship. The other five men had withdrawn to the other side of the cabin and were watching listlessly the big, ragged, barrel-chested Martian crouching on all fours against the side of the cabin and ferociously baring his teeth.

"What's the matter down there?" called Winford sharply.

SIX pairs of eyes looked up at him. Agar forgot he was a dog and stared with the rest. They were an unkempt, ragged lot with unshaven faces and the dirty, white canvas uniforms of mine prisoners. The group was composed of four Martians and two Venusians.

"Let's go back," growled Nizzo, whose squat, powerful body and long arms bespoke his Venus ancestry. "It's death out here. No food. No water, excepting the emergency ration you have up there in the box. That will scarcely last till we can reach Mercury again. N[illegible] tell us that the fuel is nearly exhausted. Let's go back, I say! We [illegible] want to swing about the Sun in this as our tomb for all eternity. At least we eat and drink at the mines, even though the whips of the drivers hurry us on to an early death."

"You're crazy, Nizzo," harshly retorted Winford. "You know what they do when escaped prisoners are brought back, or come of their own free will. The Universe knows nothing of the caged saurians in the warden's gardens, nor of the incorrigible prisoners that go to feed them. But I know—we all of us know. Far better to remain out here and die whole, than to be devoured alive by a slobbering horror."

A heated argument ensued among the men below. Presently Nizzo looked up again.

"But you have no plan!" he shouted at the Earthman. "We have followed you blindly so far, and here we are off the traffic lanes. Our only hope of being picked up now is one of space patrol ships. And short shrift may we expect from them!"

Winford scowled impatiently.

"Listen, men," he began. "This is a desperate venture, I know, and I picked every one of you carefully. You are not common scum of the prison mines. Every man of you can be depended upon to put through a daring escape of this nature. Every man of you is an innocent victim of the rotten politicians and corrupt officials that now hold sway in the Three Planets. Take Jarl there, for example." He indicated a big, patient, resigned Martian. "He is under life sentence in the penal mines simply because his brother-in-law wanted his lands and wealth. As for myself, I had a sister who suffered the misfortune of being seen and coveted by Silas Teutoberg, a member of the Earth Council. . . ."

HE choked at the thought, his pale face rigid with emotion. Those below saw the flash of his lambent eyes. He controlled himself with an effort, and continued:

"I have said nothing of any plan beyond that of making our escape in this prison tender off Mercury, but I had a plan behind that. It is true that we seem to be off the regular traffic lanes, but space liners between Venus and Earth just now are cutting in quite close to Mercury, due to the position of the three planets in their orbits. This formed the basis of the whole venture.

"During the three interplanetary days we have floated out here, I have repeatedly scanned the Void, thinking every minute we would sight a craft we could reach. But so far luck has been against us. All I ask is that you do not allow yourselves to be discouraged, for sooner or later we'll get a break."

A chorus of enthusiastic approval answered him. Winford sighed with relief, then stared abruptly through the window and gave a shout. The others below swarmed up the ladder and crowded into the tiny control nest. Winford pointed.

Far off against the black depths of space toward Venus gleamed the tiny, elliptical, silvery hull of a ship, bearing slightly toward them. Although sharply outlined, the craft was hundreds of miles away as the men realized. Winford checked it swiftly through the telescope distance calculator, determined its speed, and rapidly formed his plan.

"There are plenty of space suits in the lockers," he said tersely. "Get into them. Stand by the air-lock. You, Jarl, get into the lock and take a cable with an electro-magnet anchor. Lash yourself to it. When I give the signal by blinking the lights in the lock, open the outer door and leap across to the other ship. I know you risk death from their rays, but it is our only chance. Clamp the anchor against the side of the ship and locate the emergency entrance lock."

"Suppose there is none?" interrupted Jarl stoically.

"Chances are there will be. The interplanetary treaties call for them on most ships since those five hundred passengers perished trying vainly to enter a liner after their own ship was smashed by a meteor out near Jupiter several years ago. Anyway, it's our only chance. You, Nizzo and Ragna, enter the air-lock with Jarl so that if he misses, you can pull him back. Now hurry. I'll have to maneuver this tub around so that I can approach the ship, if possible, without being noticed."

THE others scuttled back down the ladder, leaving Winford to rapidly work out his final calculations. The ship, traveling at a rate of six thousand miles an hour, would miss their little sphere by about a hundred miles. The ship was probably a slow speed freighter, a guess that was supported by the lack of port-holes in the hull.

It was a ticklish task that Winford faced. He could either approach the freighter from against the sun, trusting that the navigation officer on duty would fail to notice the dark blot of the little tender against the blinding glare. Or he could get on the far side of the ship and approach it, concealed by its black shadow. He decided on the latter plan.

The freighter was coming up fast. Winford eased the accelerator open, and moved off at right angles to its line of progress to place it between him and the sun. If the officer in charge of the freighter should see the tiny dot go shooting presently across his path, he would doubtless mistake it for a wandering meteor. As soon as he crossed the path of the big ship, Winford slowly turned his little craft toward the protecting shadow of his prospective victim, and picked up speed as quickly as he [illegible] until the little tender was traveling at the same speed as the freighter. Lucky it was for him that the big craft was not a mail liner, for if it had been, the little ball could never have gained speed enough to equal it.

The shadow of the freighter presently enveloped the little ship, and the two hung side by side. Winford eased the tender in toward the big craft, fully realizing that the meteor warning dial in the control room of the freighter would hint at his presence by its pronounced fluctuation. But there was no help for it; he could only take the chance that the navigator in charge would not investigate. Winford peered up anxiously at the windows of the control room. Apparently the little craft had not yet been discovered.

LESS than a hundred yards now separated the two craft. Winford flashed his signal to the air-lock. A moment later a dark blob that shut off the light of the stars in depths below floated across the gap from the tender to the freighter. The electric meter on the control board registered a sudden fluctuation as the electro-magnet anchor attached itself to the hull of the big ship.

Winford snapped off the propulsion beams, seized two ray pistols that lay on the chart table, and ducked down the ladder. His companions were standing before the inner door of the air-lock in their bulging space suits, awaiting his order to leave the tender. He quickly got into a suit, clamped on the helmet and screwed tight the connections. Then he opened the door of the air-lock and motioned the others into it, following the last man in.

Nizzo and Ragna were waiting there, and as the inner door closed, automatically opening the outer door, they pointed to the cable stretching away across fo[illegible]rds of empty space to the s[illegible]ig freighter. Winford c[illegible]ut faintly the form of [illegible]was clambering cautiously [illegible]bulging side of the ship on hands and knees, seeking the emergency air-lock. Winford beckoned to the others to follow, and leaped out into space along the cable.

It was a terrifying experience, for no matter how often a man made such a trip, there was always the primitive fear of falling into those millions upon millions of miles of space below where the stars gleamed, red, green, white and blue in the cold depths. Yet a man had no weight. He merely pulled himself along the cable, which kept him from getting lost.

He reached the bulging side of the hull and continued upward on hands and knees, now held to it by its own attraction for his body. The others followed, and scattered out seeking the emergency entrance lock.

AT the end of an hour they were in despair. There was no emergency entrance lock! Winford bitterly resigned himself to their fate. This was the end of their daring attempt. He must go forward now to the control room windows and attract the attention of the navigating officer. It meant surrender and subsequent death in the teeth of the caged saurians, but if they remained much longer where they were they would freeze to death, anyway, for the batteries that warmed their suits were running down under the continued strain, and when they ceased to function, the deadly cold of interstellar space would claim them. He managed to make known his intentions to the others and was starting forward when Fate took a hand.

The prison tender ship, which was still floating at the end of its cable at the side of the freighter, relinquished itself to the play of the forces that rule the measureless void and began to set up an orbit of its own about the bigger ship. It came to the end of its tether and swung gently against the hull of the freighter, sending a violent vibration through it; then it rebounded and struck with another crash which was utterly soundless to the stranded men on the outside of the hull, who, nevertheless, felt the vibration plainly.

Winford halted abruptly. The crew inside the ship would investigate. Fate was offering the desperate men on the outside another chance. He turned and beckoned to the others and hurried aft toward the regular air-lock, which was operated only from inside the ship. Hastily he placed the men about the outer door. Then they waited.

Five minutes later it opened, and two men in space suits crawled out. Jarl captured the first man single-handed, and Nizzo and Ragna, with perfect teamwork, overpowered the second before he realized what was taking place. Within a minute the men crowded into the air-lock, and shut the outer portal. Automatically the inner door slid open.

Winford stepped out into the passageway with his ray pistols, covering the half dozen members of the crew who gaped at the intruders in speechless astonishment. One man recovered his wits and started to run. Winford's pistol stabbed a ray after him, and he collapsed. The other members of the crew silently raised their hands in surrender and were herded into a nearby stateroom and locked in, including the two in space suits who had been captured on the hull outside.

"Overpower and imprison the crew at once," Winford ordered, as he emerged from his space suit. "Jarl, you take charge, and work through the ship. Miss no one. Bind them, imprison them, if you can, and if you must, use sterner measures. Remember you are now pirates, and if we don't capture this ship, the ship will capture us. I'll go ahead alone to the control room and introduce myself to the officers there. When you have cleaned things up, join me."

CAPTAIN ROBERS was peering out through the window at the dark blob of the space tender near the rear of the big freighter when the door of the control room opened softly and Winford slipped inside with leveled ray pistols. The two navigation officers on duty gasped in astonishment. Captain Robers whirled around. His momentary amazement gave way to wrath.

"Who the devil are you, and what do you want?" he bellowed.

Winford's eyes blazed coldly. The ray pistols in his hands twitched meaningly.

"Civility first, Captain. Hands off those instruments, gentlemen. Stand up. Face the windows. Thank you."

With catlike quickness Winford leaped behind the chart table. A glance showed that the ship was holding to its course with unchecked speed. Only the meteor detector fluctuated from the presence of the little space ship outside. No worry there. Distintegrator rays would soon dissolve it, and with it the last visible evidence of their presence on the ship.

"Now, Captain, you may turn about facing me. I want a little information."

"You'll sniff gas for this!" snarled the officer. "This is piracy pure and simple. Who are you, anyway?"

Winford smiled ironically. Captain Robers' eyes widened suddenly and he paled slightly, as he recognized the dirty white uniform.

"The mines of Mercury!" he ejaculated. "We received a heliogram not twenty-four hours ago warning us of your escape. You're Evan Winford, of Earth!"

Winford bowed slightly.

"At your service, Captain. My six co[illegible] are even now trussing up [illegible]nder of your crew down be[illegible]t choke, Captain. You are in no danger, unless you make it yourself. I desire a little information about the Universe. You see I have been out of touch for the last three years during my enforced sojourn on Mercury."

Captain Robers glared at Winford.

"Tell me, Captain, who are you, and what is this craft?"

The officer thrust out his chin stubbornly, then glanced at the pistol covering him and changed his mind.

"Captain Robers. The freighter is the *Golden Fleece*."

"Port?"

"New York. I am homeward bound with a cargo from Ceres of the Asteroids."

Winford's eyes gleamed momentarily.

"Iridium, eh?"

CAPTAIN ROBERS declined to answer. The valuable metal, which was found mostly in abundance among the Asteroids and particularly on Ceres, had proved the bait that lured pirates in flocks from all parts of the Universe to prey on the freighters that carried it, usually under heavy guard. The *Golden Fleece* had obviously been trying to slip through under the camouflage of an ordinary tramp freighter when Winford and his followers boarded her. Robers saw no reason for trying to lie about Ceres, since Winford would discover it later when he examined the log. Winford, however, did not press the question about the cargo.

"Who is the owner, Captain?"

"The Interstellar Transportation Company, New York, Silas Teutoberg, president."

Winford leaped to his feet.

"Repeat that name, Captain," he ordered harshly.

"Silas Teutoberg," sullenly complied the officer. "But don't [illegible] excited. He has already [illegible]"

"Why?"

A crafty light appeared [illegible] captain's eyes. He sensed a slight advantage in retaining this knowledge himself.

"I decline to answer," he stated.

The lambent flames leaped ominously in Winford's eyes. He toyed with the ray pistol expressively, then glanced up at a sudden interruption. The control room door had opened, admitting Jarl and Ragna.

"The crew is all accounted for," announced Jarl. "We imprisoned a hundred men and have control."

"Very good, Jarl," replied Winford calmly. "Ragna, take these two navigating officers down and lock them up with the rest. Jarl, you remain here. I have a little task for you."

"Awah," replied Jarl, using the Martian term for "very good, sir."

"Captain Robers here is going to strip off his clothing and pass out through the air-lock into space." Winford spoke each word with cold precision.

THE officer jerked up his head in sudden terror. He had once witnessed the modern equivalent for the ancient piratical sentence of walking the plank and the vivid memory rose before him. He saw again the nude man cowering inside the air-lock as the inner door shut, the wafting out into interstellar space of his struggling body as the atmosphere inside the lock rushed out of the outer opening door, and the fatal bloating of the body from the sudden pressure from within. The horror of it unlocked the officer's tongue.

"I'll answer, I'll answer!" he cried. "What do you want to know?"

"Tell me why Silas Teutoberg is resigning as president of the Interstellar Transportation Company."

In the momentary silence that followed, Jarl's eyes narrowed with sudden intensity. His interest escaped Winford, who was watching Robers closely. The officer gulped with relief.

"Teutoberg has been named governor of the new emigration colonies the United States is establishing on Ganymede," he explained hurriedly. "The Earth Council, which recently took over the most fertile provinces on the third moon of Jupiter, with the full approval of the Interplanetary Council, has named him for the post. The position is nearly the same as that of an absolute monarch. But he could not hold a government post and retain his executive position with the Interstellar people, so he resigned."

Winford eyed him skeptically. Captain Robers, now greatly agitated, gestured frantically toward the chart table.

"I am telling you the truth!" he assured Winford fervently. "You'll find somewhere on the table a copy of the Heliogram News which tells of his departure from New York less than twelve hours ago in a specially chartered liner with his staff and friends for New Chicago, on Ganymede. It also tells of his approaching marriage to Princess Irkeen, daughter of King Donossus, a political marriage that will assure Teutoberg's position with the natives."

"POOR girl," muttered Winford under his breath, searching among the loose papers on the chart table for the copy of the news which was received every twelve hours by automatic helioprinter from New York millions of miles away. He read the article about Teutoberg through and laid aside the paper. Turning to the charts he jotted down a few hasty calculations, and stepped to the controls where he set a new course for the "iron mike" of the space freighter to follow.

"Captain Robers, I have changed my mind about having you go out into space from the air-lock," he announced, turning again to the anxious officer. "We will hold you prisoner with your men, and later on will set you down on one of Jupiter's smaller satellites—Callisto, if possible, since the living conditions there are quite satisfactory. Word will be sent to Mars of where you can be found. All of your crew, excepting those who wish to sign on with me, will be freed with you. I and my six companions are hardly enough to operate such a craft as this. Incidentally, we are appropriating the *Golden Fleece* and its cargo. If the Interstellar people object, they may present the bill to Silas Teutoberg, and he can deduct it from the income my property yields him."

Captain Robers glanced up curiously at the harsh bitterness that crept into Winford's voice. Then his glance shifted to Jarl, and he was amazed to see the malevolent expression that appeared on the Martian's face as he listened to Winford's words. The moment passed, and Jarl silently escorted the officers below to be locked up with the rest of his crew.

THREE weeks later, Earth time, the *Golden Fleece* slipped into the atmosphere of Callisto, the fourth satellite of mighty Jupiter, which swung in its orbit a million and a quarter miles from the great planet. Far off to the west, separated by two million miles of empty space, floated Ganymede, the third satellite, on which the people of the United States were now gaining a foothold with their newly planted colonies.

The big freighter, under the engineering genius of Agar, had made a marvelously speedy journey from its original position just outside the orbit of Mercury to this point nearly four hundred and fifty million miles away from the little planet. Winford studied the ground below. He was only partly acquainted with the topography of Callisto and wanted to be sure to pick a spot where Captain Robers and his men could be certain of surviving until help arrived. His eye picked out a satisfactory spot close beside the Gnan River in one of the stunted conifer forests of the planet. Swiftly he dropped the big freighter until it hovered but a few yards above the ground.

A freight port-hole was opened, and Captain Robers, accompanied by half his crew, prepared to descend. They were all bundled in heavy garments, for the temperature of Callisto, never high, frequently drops to sub-zero readings. Winford stood at the port and watched the men climb down the rope ladder to the ground below.

ROBERS was last to go. He faced Winford bitterly, for this escaped lifer from Mercury had stolen not only his ship, but half his crew as well, and the prospect of a liberal share of the rich iridium cargo in the hold.

"You'll regret this day!" snarled the captain. "I'll be in the front row of spectators when you sniff the death gas in the glass execution cage on Mars. Hundreds have tried this sort of thing before you, and every man of them has come finally to the cage."

"You're only delaying us, Captain Roberts," replied Winford coldly. "I am in a hurry to be on my way. Kindly move down the ladder and join your men. Your hand weapons and food supplies will be dropped by parachute as we leave. I might add that in a short time I expect to be in a position to broadcast an S O S message for you which should bring rescue ships here to Callisto for you. Good-by."

He turned away, leaving the officer to descend the ladder in baffled fury to the ground below, where his men huddled together [illegible] unfamiliar cold, and stared half fearful at the far-away sun glowing like a yellow arc-light in the depths of space half a billion miles away.

When the rising ship reached the thousand-foot level, the weapons and food were dropped by parachute, and the port-hole closed and locked. Winford hurried forward to the control room where the two navigators, who had signed with him for a hundred and twentieth share of the iridium each, were already pointing the nose of the ship up through the purple heavens toward Ganymede.

"Open her up! Use the emergency propulsion beams!" ordered Winford. "We are overdue now for my tryst with this new governor at New Chicago!"

The officers gazed at him in awe, wondering what desperate thing he planned at the new colonial capital.

WINFORD was poring over the maps of New Chicago six hours later in the chart room when one of the navigation officers touched him on the shoulder.

"Battle sphere rapidly overhauling us from sunward, sir," said the man. "Approaching us against the glare of sunlight until it was so close when we discovered it that escape is now impossible. I'd say it is one of the new 4-Q heavies of the Interplanetary Council patrol fleet."

Winford hurried to the telescope. As his anxious eye took in the spherical outline of the battle craft, showing as a silvery crescent to the rear and starboard of them, he recognized it as one of the heavily armored spheres of the Interplanetary Council's fleet with the new long range K-ray disintegrator guns.

Winford seized a telescope speed calculator. The sphere was coming up far too rapidly to permit the *Golden Fleece* to pick up speed soon enough to escape—although he was confident the freighter could do it now, since Agar had changed its propulsion machinery.

Perhaps the commander of the battle sphere was merely curious about the *Golden Fleece* since it appeared to be an ordinary tramp freighter with no distinguishing emblems or other identification, and was coming close to give her a better look. Or perhaps he was hurrying to some destination and his nearness to the *Golden Fleece* was merely accidental.

Whatever the cause, there remained but one thing to do, and that was to keep the freighter on its course as though nothing out of the ordinary was taking place. Winford turned to the communication board and cut in the universal radio wave. The instrument was silent. He sighed. At least the commander of the battle sphere was not trying to communicate with him.

Winford turned back to the window again. The sphere was quite close now, and its speed was dropping rapidly. Suddenly the radio loud-speaker hummed to life.

"Ahoy there, aboard the freighter," sounded a stern, determined voice. "This is the Interplanetary Council battle sphere, *Eagle,* nearing you. We are coming aboard you to investigate. Make ready your air-lock to receive us. Attempt nothing hostile. Hundred-kilowatt ray guns are trained on you."

WINFORD cut in the microphone and answered with the customary "O. K." reply; then he turned to the two white-faced navigators.

"Carry on as usual," he said grimly. "Perhaps we can fool them once they are aboard."

Then he turned to the phone connecting with the crew's quarters. He hurriedly explained the situation to Jarl and instructed him to receive the boarding party at the air-lock.

The big battle sphere was drawing close alongside. Magnet grapnels shot across the narrow space between the two craft and gripped the side of the freighter, followed by the cable bridge along which the boarding party presently came wavering their way to the air-lock of the freighter.

Winford counted fifty men, then turned away dejectedly. This was no ordinary inspection party, but a prize crew coming aboard. He sat down wearily. Just as victory seemed almost within his grasp—had been actually in his hand when he had started to Ganymede—this battle sphere popped up out of nowhere like an inescapable doom to strike him and his companions down. He gritted his teeth. Some way, somehow he would still win out. He and his fellows had come too far to be cheated of liberty now.

The door of the control room opened, and a smart young officer in gold and gray of the Interplanetary Council Marine service entered, accompanied by three privates with drawn pistols who took their positions near the door. Winford noted the clean-cut lines and fresh features of the officer and felt that under different circumstances he would like to know him.

"I am Lieutenant Commander 6666-A," the officer introduced himself, using the designation the Interplanetary Council required of all their fighting men. "You are Evan Winford, are you not?"

Winford nodded.

"You nearly got away with it, Winford," complimented the officer with a boyish grin. "I almost admire you for it. But you made at least one fatal error."

"What was that?" asked Winford curiously.

"When you put Captain Robers and his men off this ship they smuggled out with them a hand-operated helio set. Each man carried a part. Within an hour after you left they had it assembled and were cranking our S O S signals. We happened to be but a million miles off Callisto and picked up their message. At once our commander decided to start out and rope in the *Golden Fleece* before you did any further damage. And here we are."

WINFORD cursed himself under his breath. Fool that he had been not to have had the men and their baggage searched more carefully before he allowed them to leave the freighter. Nizzo was responsible for that. He should be—but it was too late now. No use crying over spilled milk. He forced a grin and shrugged.

"'The best laid plans of mice and men—'" he quoted philosophically. "I hope the entire blame for this wild venture is put on my shoulders where it belongs when we are brought to trial. These two navigators here and the rest of the men are in no way responsible. I forced every man of them under pain of death to join me."

The young officer shook his head and smiled.

"Not a chance of that, Winford. You'll all stand trial alike, and you know it. You are rather a strange sort of pirate, it seems to me, to offer yourself as a sacrifice for your men. I'd say you are too tender-hearted for buccaneering in the Void."

"If I had succeeded in reaching New Chicago, you might have gained a different impression of me," retorted Winford, his lambent eyes flaming at the thought. "I have sworn to kill Silas Teutoberg, the new governor of Ganymede, because he sent me to die in the mines of Mercury for a crime I never committed."

The young officer laughed.

"You can set your mind at rest about him, Winford. He was due at New Chicago five days ago in his specially chartered space liner from New York. Nothing was heard from his ship ten days after he [illegible] New York with his guests aboard. His last reported position was near the Mars orbit and since then nothing has come out of the Void. They'll just chalk him under the 'Lost in Space' column on the admiralty boards of the Universe and give the credit for his disappearance to some hurtling meteor. We were on our way to search for the remains of his liner when we intercepted the messages from Captain Robers and his men on Callisto."

WINFORD'S face was bleak.

"Fate has prevented me from achieving my greatest desire," he said harshly. "To rid the Universe of that scourge to humanity would have been one of the sweetest moments of my life. I've dreamed of it for years."

The officer lighted a cigarette.

"Perhaps you are right, but I'd say the chance is gone in more ways than one. Teutoberg is undoubtedly dead, and you are on your way to the gas execution cage on Mars. Incidentally, you are now my prisoner. I'll not lock you in the hold with the rest of your crew, but will confine you to your stateroom."

Winford surveyed him curiously.

"I warn you that I'll take advantage of any opportunity to escape," he said.

The officer grinned.

"That's to be expected. So would any other man doomed to die. But the coronium doors, locks and walls of the *Golden Fleece's* staterooms are practically escape proof, and with two of my marines on guard outside your door, with orders to kill if you break out, I feel reasonably safe."

Imprisoned in his stateroom, Winford threw himself on his bunk. Too early to attempt anything yet, he considered. It would be better to wait a few days—at least until Eagle had departed. Besides, he would have to work out a plan for escape.

He glanced up at the port-hole. The sunlight was shifting. He arose and peered out. Twenty-five miles away he could see the battle sphere standing out across the Void on a sunward course. The *Golden Fleece* was turning her nose toward distant

Mars, a long journey, since the Red Planet was on the opposite side of the sun, seven hundred million miles away.

Winford knew what was taking place. The commander of the battle sphere was again resuming his mission of searching for the missing liner, while the young officer and his crew were taking the *Golden Fleece* with its iridium cargo and pirate crew directly to Mars.

Meantime the radio and audiovision announcers on all the planets were broadcasting the sensational news of the capture of the escaped convict-pirates and their forthcoming trial and certain execution on Mars. Winford turned bitterly away from the port-hole.

ONE week had passed. Winford started up out of a sound sleep. He listened tensely. There was a murmur through the big freighter. He recognized it as the clanging of the great alarm gongs through the hull of the big ship, muffled by the walls of his stateroom. Something was afoot!

He threw off the covers, sprang out on the deck and pulled on his clothes. This might be a break! Those gongs never sounded without plenty of cause.

He pulled a chair to the door, mounted it, and cautiously opening the transom which he had previously loosened, thrust his head out into the passage.

A marine was running down the passage. The guards before Winford's door tried to stop him, but the man ran on. Presently another came along. The guard was more successful.

"Say, Buddie, what's all the excitement?" he demanded.

"We've found Teutoberg's liner, or rather, it has found us!" exclaimed the marine. "They say old Teutoberg has trained his heaviest guns on us and is demanding that we surrender. Our skipper doesn't know just what to make of it. He's arguing with Teutoberg by radio that this old tub is in the hands of the law already and that he is taking it to Mars for the piracy court. Teutoberg says he won't be fooled by any such bunk as that; he knows we are all pirates and he is going to have this ship regardless of anything, since it belongs to his line. I've got to be hurrying along. We're getting the big guns ready, the few that we have."

Winford cautiously withdrew his head. His eyes were glowing. The whole scheme was as plain as day now. Teutoberg knew as well as every informed person in the Universe did that the *Golden Fleece* was in the hands of the Interplanetary Council marines. That talk about being entitled to the freighter because it was owned by his shipping line was so much rubbish. He was protected by insurance. What he wanted was the insurance and the ten million dollars' worth of iridium in the hold as well.

Furthermore, he had intended to have it all along. It was part of his diabolical scheme to put the shipment on an unprotected freighter. Then he had chartered a liner privately for his venture in piracy. When the liner was "lost" he was out searching for the *Golden Fleece* along the lanes where it should have been had not he, Winford, and his companions captured the craft and sent it hurtling out toward Ganymede. And now Teutoberg had succeeded in trailing it down.

WINFORD surveyed the transom pessimistically. Impossible to get through it. If only he had a ray pistol to dissolve the door lock. . . . The air ventilator! He dropped down on hands and knees and peered under the bunk. The opening seemed large enough to let his shoulders through. If he should become fast in one of the turns of the tunnel it would be all up with him. They'd probably find his body when the ship went into dock for repairs. But this was no time to think of that.

He crawled under the bunk, took out the grating and set it beside the opening. Then he wormed his way into the tunnel. It was a tight fit, but he could move. The first turn should bring him to the branch that opened out on the passage not far from his stateroom door.

Never would he forget that struggle when he forced his cramped, tortured body round the bend in the blackness a fraction of an inch at a time and crawled up the branch. If he was mistaken—but he wasn't. Presently he was looking out of the grating into the passage.

Members of the crew raced back and forth like disturbed ants. From the snatches of conversation that reached him Winford learned that Teutoberg had succeeded in getting the range of the freighter and was holding her helpless under the imposing muzzles of his heavy disintegrator-ray guns.

The door of the control opened and the boyish commander, his face pale and drawn, thrust out his head.

"They're coming aboard, men," he shouted to the group in the passage below. "I can't stop them. Our only chance may come after they are aboard."

"Why don't you free the pirates and let them help us?" cried one of the men.

"Never," returned the young commander firmly. "They are in our care, and by the gods, we are going to bring them and this ship through safe and sound!"

A MOMENT later he descended the stairs and led his men aft. Teutoberg displayed a flash of generalship, for his first ten men who came in through the air-lock were pistol experts. They rayed the marines in their tracks and cleared the passage leading to the lock, before the defenders could get organized. A few minutes later the invaders were spreading through the ship, hunting down and ruthlessly slaying the marines whom they outnumbered three to one. Scattered fights to the death took place on all the decks. Winford, snugly ensconced in his air tunnel, raged inwardly as the crackling of the rays and the agonized screams of the wounded and dying came to his ears.

The fighting seemed to be drawing nearer. He risked peeping out. The young commander and half a dozen of his men covering themselves as best they might with the inadequate protector shields of the service, retreated to the foot of the stairs leading up to the control room. As the invaders prepared to mow them down a sudden hush fell on the men and the invaders parted. A huge man stepped out before them. Winford sucked in his breath sharply as he recognized Teutoberg and saw him take a step forward in the direction of the marines.

Teutoberg raised his hand toward Commander 6666-A and spoke.

"Will you surrender, or must my men obliterate you? I would say that you pirates have your backs to the wall. Surely life is sweet. Why not surrender while you still have it?"

"We're not pirates!" declared the young commander hotly.

Teutoberg sneered.

"It will take more than a gold and gray uniform of the Interplanetary Council military forces to convince me," he retorted. "Uniforms of any kind can be obtained anywhere in the Universe where there happens to be a competent tailor."

"The only pirates, excepting yourselves, aboard this ship are under lock and key," said the commander. "That's where you will be before this matter is settled."

TEUTOBERG laughed. His manner changed suddenly.

"What a line of talk for a pirate," he commented affably. "Come, youngster, there is no need to sacrifice lives uselessly. Surrender, since you're outnumbered anyway, and let's discuss this thing on a sane basis."

Commander 6666-A hesitated. Winford could scarcely refrain from shouting treachery. Then the marines lowered their shields and rays. Next instant they went down under the charge of the invaders.

The young commander was chalky white when they dragged him bound and helpless to his feet. A trickle of blood made a crimson line from the corner of his mouth, and his eyes sparkled with helpless rage.

"You dirty snake!" he gasped. "You'll sniff gas for this!"

Teutoberg laughed scornfully.

"Take them back to the air-lock and shove them out naked one at a time," he ordered curtly. "That's the way they would have treated us. Save the young bantam for the last. Now, where is this Evan Winford? I have an old score to settle with him."

Up in his air tunnel Winford nodded grimly to himself. Teutoberg's words only added to the proof that he knew all along that the *Golden Fleece* was in the hands of the Interplanetary marines, for his request for Winford revealed that he had been following the helio reports of the capture of the ship by the marines and the stories being broadcast throughout the Universe of how Winford and Jarl and their pirate companions were being taken with the ship to Mars for piracy and execution.

Neither Commander 6666-A nor his men deigned to answer Teutoberg, but one of his own men had already discovered that Winford was locked in his own stateroom, and he promptly indicated the door.

Teutoberg scowled, drew a pistol in either hand, and strode to the door. One of the men unlocked it, and he kicked it open. He waited expectantly, then advanced cautiously into the room. The sound of his baffled curses filled the passage. Winford grinned mirthlessly.

"Someone dies for this!" shouted Teutoberg, storming out into the passage. "Where is he, I say? Bring me that Martian, Jarl! He'll know, if anyone does. Bring him, I say, and I'll torture the truth out of his big carcass!"

WINFORD'S grin vanished. His eyes grew anxious as he waited, tense and breathless, until Jarl, with his big hands lashed together behind his back, was brought up from the hold.

"So we meet again, Jarl?" jeered Teutoberg, scowling blackly at him. "Where is this master of yours, this Winford?"

Jarl's eyes met Teutoberg's impassively. All too well he knew the innate cruelty of this Earthman. Some explanation would have to be made to satisfy him. Never a flicker of an eye-lash revealed what that explanation would be, but Jarl glanced stoically at the empty stateroom.

"He did it," he said calmly.

"Did what, you clod?" Teutoberg flung at him savagely.

"Ended his life as he swore he would."

"Suicide? Impossible! Where is the body?"

"He destroyed it together with his life by drinking disintegrator concentrate. He carried a capsule of it when we escaped from Mercury, and I've heard him swear time and again that he would die before he would permit himself to be taken back."

Teutoberg swallowed the story. There was nothing else to do, apparently. He raved and cursed. Once he raised his pistol to Jarl's heart and lowered it again.

"You'll take his place, Martian dog!" he snarled. "By proxy I shall treat him as he deserves, and you shall be the proxy. Back to the hold with you for the present!"

With that Teutoberg whirled about, strode up the stairs and vanished in the control room.

Commander 6666-A and his men were dragged aft to the air-lock, leaving the passage near Winford temporarily empty. He broke out the grating and wormed his way out of the air tunnel, dropping on the floor hands first. He sprang to his feet, and started grimly up the steps to the control room. Inside that room was Teutoberg, a bigger man than himself, and armed, yet Winford, barehanded, cautiously opened the door and stepped inside.

TEUTOBERG was standing at one side of the room gazing in rapt attention at the slaughter of the helpless marines. One by one he watched them emerge from the air-lock bloated and white in their nakedness with their convulsed limbs already growing rigid in the icy cold of space. Out in the open space between the two ships they hung motionless a few minutes, then swiftly dissolved and vanished under the ray of a small disintegrator gun on the liner.

Teutoberg smiled crookedly.

The door clicked behind him. Teutoberg turned with a startled oath. Winford, foul with grime and his clothing torn to rags, stood there. Teutoberg's eyes widened. Both hands leaped downward for the holstered pistols in his belt. At that instant Winford lunged for him.

One of Teutoberg's hands was now gripping a pistol. Winford struck frenziedly, knocking it from Teutoberg's grasp. The weapon slid under the chart table out of reach. Winford clutched Teutoberg's left hand which held the still holstered pistol.

SUDDENLY he saw an advantage, and his heart leaped in exultation. Round behind Teutoberg he pivoted—a wrestling trick he had learned as a boy. For an instant they stood back to back. Then with a mighty effort Winford heaved upward relentlessly on his opponent's forearm.

Teutoberg screamed in pain as something snapped in his wrist. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers. Winford flicked it out of reach under the table with his toe, but had no chance to reach for it, because Teutoberg had managed to work himself free.

With a bellow of animal rage and with arms flailing like wind-mills he charged at Winford again. Winford met his rush with a rapid series of blows and Teutoberg went down. But up he came, a wild light in his eyes. Again he went down, only to struggle gamely to his feet once more.

Winford was gasping for breath. It amazed him that Teutoberg could endure so much punishment. His arm must be broken and he was terribly battered, yet here he came staggering back for more. Winford now hunched down and, like a crouching animal, advanced slowly toward his enemy. Suddenly he started a right almost from the deck straight for Teutoberg's chin. It connected. Teutoberg was lifted clear of the deck and hurled unconscious against the side of the control room six feet away.

Winford staggered to the communication board and his trembling fingers clutched the air-lock phone.

"Hello, hello!" he gasped. "Teutoberg speaking. Send no more marines out through the lock just now. . . . Yes, of course this is Teutoberg."

He hung the instrument back on its hook and clung dizzily to the edge of the table. At least the slaughter was halted for the time being.

HE would have to act fast. He caught up the big water pitcher from the holder on the wall where it had miraculously escaped the fight, gulped deeply from it, and splattered water down his face and chest. Then he picked up the two pistols from the deck, placed one in his belt and gripped the other firmly as he approached the unconscious Teutoberg.

At the first splash of water in his face Teutoberg groaned and rolled over.

"Get up, you," Winford ordered harshly.

Teutoberg sat up groggily. The sight of the pistol and Winford's eyes brought him out with a sudden shock.

"Get over to that air-lock phone and say just what I tell you to," ordered Winford grimly. "One false word, and I'll ray you plenty."

Teutoberg staggered to his feet obediently and took the phone, for he had read death in Winford's hard eyes.

"Hello, Jarvis?" he asked, his body rigid under the prod of Winford's pistol. "This is Teutoberg. . . . Yes, I talked a minute ago. I've changed my plans, Jarvis. We've got to get the iridium out of the hold and into the liner as soon as possible, or we'll be sighted by some other craft. Take all the men but ten and go back to the liner. Make ready there for the cargo. . . . You'll have to clear some cabins; there is more than I thought. There isn't much food aboard here, anyway, and it is better to let the men go to mess right away and start transferring the cargo immediately afterward."

Teutoberg hung up the phone.

"Is that satisfactory?" he asked sullenly.

"It will do," was Winford's terse reply. "Now when the men have gone back to the liner, order two of the remainder to bring up Jarl from the hold to the control room here."

JARL was as impassive as usual when he entered the control room and beheld Winford in charge there, although his two captors stared in amazement at Teutoberg, bloody and battered, seated against the side of the room with his hands upraised. Jarl calmly disarmed his two captors and closed the door.

"Only eight of Teutoberg's men besides these remain on the *Golden Fleece*," Winford explained to Jarl. "Take care of them first, then release the rest of our men from the hold. Tell Agar to take charge of the machinery as soon as possible, and have the gunners stand by for further orders."

"Awah," replied Jarl stoically, and left the control room.

He took care of the eight invaders in his very efficient Martian fashion, for he pistoled them with neatness and dispatch where they stood before the air-lock with the young commander and his remaining two marines, waiting to thrust them out into space. Winford had not instructed Jarl just how to take care of the situation, and the Martian attended to it in his own way. Commander 6666-A, with his arms bound behind his back, stared in amazement as Jarl calmly stepped over the dead bodies and went on his way to release his fellow pirates from the hold.

Up in the control room the radio loud-speaker hummed to life.

"Teutoberg, Teutoberg, are you there?" cried an anxious voice. "Three Interplanetary battle spheres are approaching from the direction of the Earth! They are still two thousand miles away, but they are coming on fast! We're going to cut loose and run for it. If you're not back here in five minutes, you'll have to stay where you are!"

Winford cut in then for Teutoberg, who gulped painfully before speaking.

"Go right ahead," he said in a strained voice. "I'm staying here on the *Golden Fleece.* I'll—I'll see you later."

"Why didn't you say you'd meet them in the Hereafter?" suggested Winford coldly, as he cut out the microphone. "That's where you are going as soon as Jarl returns. He'll be glad to help you on your way, for he hasn't forgotten the aid you gave his brother-in-law in robbing him and sending him to Mercury."

Teutoberg made no answer.

Things were happening swiftly Already the liner was lurching forward frantically with every propulsion ray flaming as she started her flight through space away from the avenging battle spheres. Red lights twinkled on the control board of the *Golden Fleece.* Agar, at the generators now, threw in the power. The big freighter leaped ahead like a grayhound, soon reaching a speed that even the swift battle spheres could not equal, thanks to the engineering genius of the half-insane Agar.

Winford glanced around. Teutoberg was already gone. Jarl had taken him down to the air-lock. Winford tried to forget him. There were other things to think of. There were the details of taking the *Golden Fleece* out to Pluto near the frontiers of the Sun's domain—Pluto, that stronghold of the space pirates where a man could sell an entire planet or any part of it, no questions asked, if he could produce it for the buccaneer kings to bid on. The freighter and its cargo were as good as sold already, and the money they would bring would be more than enough to buy pardons and freedom for everyone in the crew.

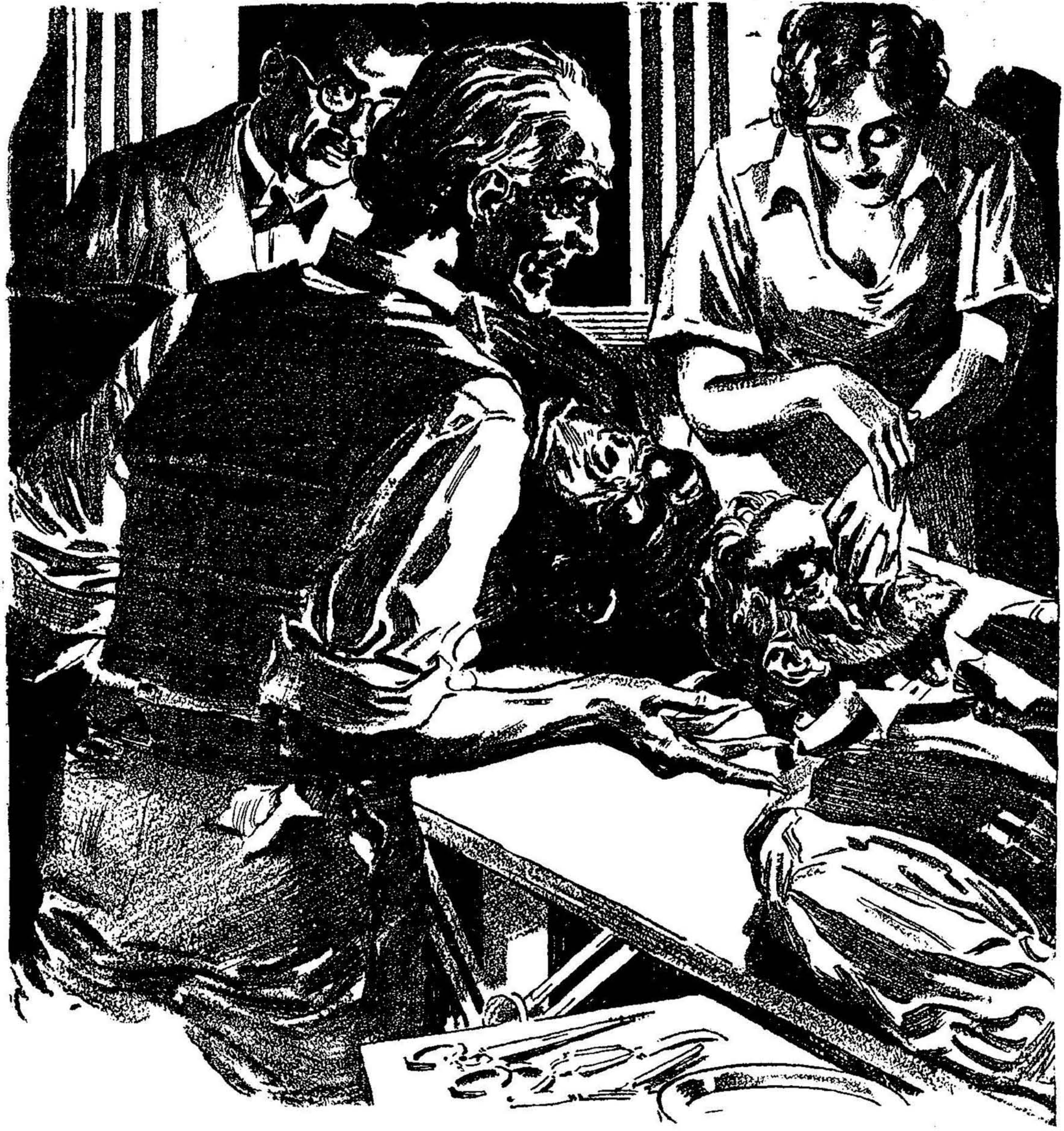
THERE were many details to consider carefully, but instead Winford found himself thinking of Teutoberg down by the air-lock, stripped of his clothing, ready for his last adventure with life. As much as Winford hated the man, he was forced into an unwilling admiration for his dogged fight in the control room. A mere word in that telephone would save him. Winford shook his head irritably. The man deserved death. Yet again he saw the set features, the final walk into the air-lock. Suddenly Winford found himself at the phone and heard himself giving the order that would save Teutoberg's life. He sat down again, surprised at his own weakness. He was still musing when Jarl entered.

"You couldn't go through with it," observed the big Martian impassively. "I was afraid you couldn't. It is as I have always said of you Earthlings. You think you want revenge, good old ancient vengeance; but when the moment comes and you sit in the high place and can have it, you weaken. Well, you won't have to execute Teutoberg now."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Winford.

"After I received your order and told Teutoberg he wasn't to go out through the lock after all, he grinned. It was an insult, that grin, just as though he knew all along you wouldn't have the nerve to kill him. And while I stood there asking myself if I should not go ahead and shove him out anyway, one of his men—one of the two we captured up here in this room—caught sight of that grin. He screamed something about treachery and Teutoberg betraying him to the pirates, and before I could interfere he drew a knife and stabbed Teutoberg to death right there before all of us. After that there was nothing to do but to heave his body into the air-lock and let it go on out into space."

Far back across the Void in a tiny space sphere which Winford had given him and his two marines to return to the distant battle sphere, Lieutenant Commander 6666-A saw through his telescope the white speck of Teutoberg's body leave the side of the *Golden Fleece* and wondered what it was.



The Mind Master

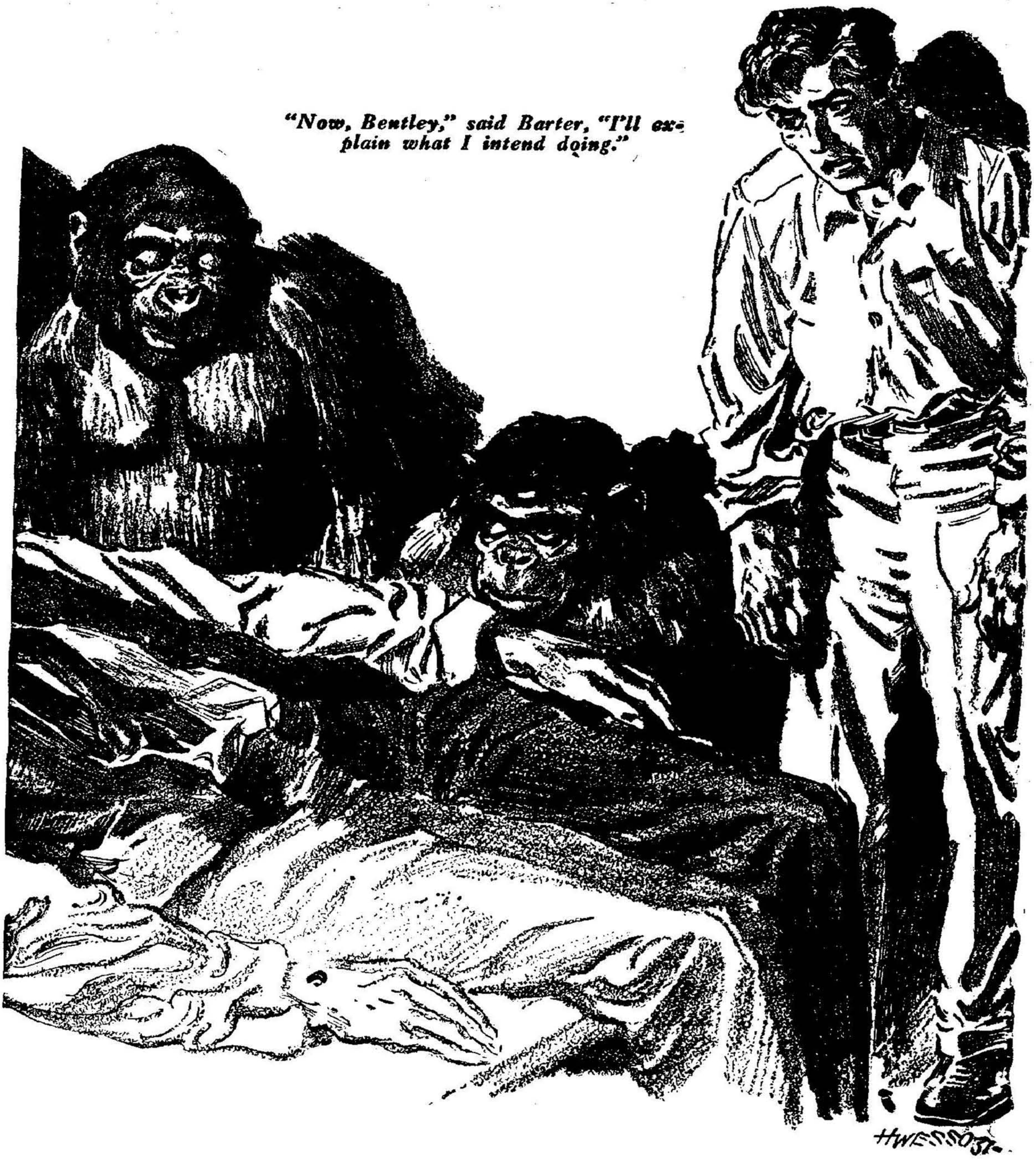
By Arthur J. Burks

Conclusion

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

LEE BENTLEY and Ellen Estabrook have just returned to America after their horrible adventure in the African jungle. They still remember with dread and loathing how Caleb Barter, a mad scientist, with his marvelous surgery, had removed the brain of Lee Bentley and placed it in the body of a giant anthropoid ape. For many days Bentley had roamed the jungle as Manape

Lee and Ellen brave the horrors of Barter's own laboratory in a rash attempt to crush the omnipotent scientist.



"Now, Bentley," said Barter, "I'll explain what I intend doing."

until finally Barter restored his brain to his own body. There was an uprising among Barter's ape-herd, and Lee and Ellen had escaped, believing the mad genius the victim of the beasts.

Now on their return to New York they read of the machinations of one who signs himself the Mind Master, and who threatens first to kill a well-known financial figure and thereafter steal the brains of twenty prominent men whose names he mentions. Bentley shudderingly recalls Caleb Barter, the brain wizard.

As they ride in their taxicab, the naked figure of a man staggers out of the Flatiron Building. He is screaming madly and is bleeding from a number of wounds which might have been made by the fingernails of a giant. The man dies, but not before they hear him murmur something incoherent about the Mind Master.

Bentley confers with Thomas Tyler, a famous detective, and shows him a tuft of hair he had taken from the hand of the dead man. There is a telephone call from Caleb Barter while they are at Tyler's office, and he boasts of being the Mind Master and threatens Lee and Ellen.

Barter in his fantastically equipped and secret laboratory in the heart of New York City is able to control his living puppets by remote control. He now sends Lecky, a human being with the brain of an ape, to kidnap Harold Hervey, a great financier. The abduction is cleverly executed, and later the body of Hervey, its skullpan missing, is delivered to his home.

Tyler and Bentley prepare to thwart Barter's attempt to abduct one Saret Balisle from his sixteenth-story office the following morning. They make thorough preparations, and the corridor and the street below are filled with police. Unexpectedly, under their very noses, a giant ape captures Balisle, climbs out on the window-sill and begins a slow descent of the side of the building. As the police wait breathlessly, unable to interfere, a limousine shoots up on the sidewalk and the ape, only two stories above the street, throws Balisle through the roof of the car, which makes a hurried getaway.

Bentley and the police trap the ape in the building and wound it mortally. Before it dies, they learn that it houses the brain of Hervey.

Knowing that Barter will need another ape, Bentley determines to be that ape!

CHAPTER VIII

The Mute Plungers

IT would be difficult to comprehend the nervous strain under which Manhattan had been laboring during the past thirty-six hours. The story of the kidnaping of Harold Hervey had not been given to the newspapers, for an excellent reason. If Hervey's financial enemies knew of his kidnaping and death they would hammer away at his stocks until they fell to nothing and his family, accustomed to fabulous wealth, would have been reduced to beggary.

The Mind Master himself, up to a late hour, had given no word to the newspapers in his "manifestoes." The Hervey family held its breath fearing that he would—for the newspapers would have played the story for all the sensationalism it would carry. Bentley, when this matter was called to his attention, wondered. Barter had kept his own counsel for a purpose, but what was it? There was no way of asking him.

The story of the mad race down Broadway in pursuit of the limousine which had returned the lifeless body of Hervey to his residence had been a sensational one, and the tabloids had given it their best treatment. The chauffeur who had crawled out like a monkey atop his careening car, to lose his life when catapulted into the entrance to the Twenty-third Street subway station; the three policemen whose lives had been lost because the chauffeur hadn't stopped as they had expected him to, the kidnaping of Saret Balisle by a great ape hadn't yet broken as a story, nor the murder of Balisle's chauffeur.

But everybody knew something of the story of the naked man of the day before. Many were the speculations as to what had ripped and torn his flesh from his body, along with his clothes. What manner of claws had it been which had sliced him in scores of places as though with many razors?

Men and women walked the streets apprehensively, and many of them turned at intervals to look behind them. No telling what they would do when the story of Balisle's kidnaping by an anthropoid ape and a queer mute chauffeur got abroad. To top it all the police pursuers lost the Balisle limousine and Saret Balisle had taken his place among the lost.

BENTLEY knew as soon as the disgruntled and rather frightened police officers returned to the Clinton Building with the news that Balisle had got away from them in the stolen Balisle car, that already the ill-fated young man was probably under the anesthetic which Caleb Barter used on his victims.

"Tyler, do you know a surgeon who can do any surgical job short of brain transplantation?"

"Yeah. There's a chap has offices in the Fifth Avenue Building. He's probably the very best in the racket. Maybe it's because of his name. It's Tyler."

"Some relative of yours?"

"Not much. He's just my dad—and one of the world's finest and cleverest."

"Will he listen to reason? Can he perform delicate operations?"

"He's my dad, Bentley, and he'd do almost anything I asked him so long as it was honest . . . and he could switch the noses of a mosquito and a humming bird so skillfully that the humming bird would go looking for a sleeping cop and the mosquito would start building a nest in a tree."

"Get him here. No—has he an operating room where all sound can be shut out? I've got a hunch I'd like somehow to try and drop a screen around us as we work. Maybe your dad would know what to do. You see, I'm positive that Barter sees everything we do and if he sees me turning into an ape he would just chuckle and pass up the trap."

"He's got a lead armored room where he keeps a bit of radium."

"That's it. Talk to him. No, not on the phone. You'll have to figure out some way to do it so that you can be sure Barter isn't listening."

"I'll manage. I'll send him a note."

"Your messenger will be killed on the way to him."

"Then I'll go myself."

"And Barter will watch everybody that goes into his office or comes out, and mark down each person as possibly being connected with the police. However, you figure it out."

WHEN Tyler had gone and the dead "ape" had been stretched out in one corner of Balisle's office, and covered with something to cloak its hideousness, Bentley telephoned Ellen Estabrook.

"Have I been making any appointments with you this morning?" he asked her cheerily.

"Please don't jest when things are so terrible. Have you seen the latest papers?"

"No. What do they say?"

"There's a lot of the story I'm thinking about. You'd better read it right away. It's an extra, anyhow. The newsies ought to be calling it around you somewhere—and where are you, anyway?"

Bentley informed her, and told her, too, that he would be with her as soon as he possibly could. Taking the usual masculine advantage he decided to tell her now what he wouldn't have had the heart to tell her to her face, that he was planning a rather desperate stunt to reach Barter, and would consequently be away from her for an indefinite period.

"But I'll see you first?" she said after a long hesitation. Bentley could hear her voice tremble, though he knew she was fighting desperately to keep him from noting the catch in her voice.

"Yes, nothing will happen until—well, not until I've seen you again."

Just as Bentley hung up the receiver the extra was being cried. Some two hours had now elapsed since Balisle had been taken away, and now the newsboys were shouting the headlines.

"Extra! Extra! All about the big Wall Street crash! Hervey fortune entirely swept away!"

BENTLEY sent an office boy out for the paper and spread it out on the desk to digest it as quickly as possible.

"One million shares of Hervey Incorporated," read the black words in a box on the first page—a story in mourning, "were dumped on the market at eleven o'clock this morning. Four men seem to have been behind the queer coup. One of them had a power of attorney from Harold Hervey himself, and he had the shares to sell. So many shares were dumped that the bottom fell out of the stock. Others holding the Hervey shares, fearful that they would get nothing at all, also began to dump, and every share thus dumped was bought up quickly by three other men about whom nobody knew anything, except that they paid with cash. The strangest thing about it all was that the three men who bought Hervey Incorporated, seemed to be dumb-mutes, for they didn't say anything. They acted through a broker, and indicated their purchases with their fingers in the conventional manner and tendered cards as identification. They were Harry Stanley, Clarence Morton, and Willard Cleve—addresses unknown, history unknown.

"Nothing, in fact, is known about any of the three or the little white-haired, apple-cheeked man who sold so heavily in Hervey Incorporated. That the three mutes did not buy the shares sold by the little white-haired man would seem to indicate that all four of them worked together ... but it is only a supposition as they were not seen together and apparently did not know one another. But the three mutes constantly ate walnuts. All four men, who among them knocked the bottom out of Wall Street, and wiped away the Hervey fortune, slipped out in the excitement inspired by their rapid buying and selling, and seemed to vanish into thin air."

Bentley didn't know much about the stock market, but it seemed to him that Barter had managed a theft of mighty proportions. With a power of attorney, which he had wrung from Hervey after his capture, he had managed to possess himself of Hervey's shares. In themselves they were worth millions. Even at a fraction of their price Barter would realize heavily on them. Selling quickly he would force the price far down. Then his puppets—and Bentley had no doubt that Stanley, Morton and Cleve were his puppets—bought all other shares offered by panicky investors in Hervey Incorporated at a tiny fraction of their value. Far less, naturally, than Barter had made by selling his loot.

The purchased shares Barter could hold for an increase. Hervey Incorporated was good and its price would go up again, and Barter would sell and gain millions.

THAT is how Bentley saw it, and his lips drew into a firmer, straighter line as, half an hour later, he explained it all to Ellen.

"It's desperate, dear," he whispered in her ear. "Manhattan's financial structure has been shaken to its foundations. But that isn't all by any means. Barter has performed his horrible operation on two of New York's most brilliant men. It was a Barter gesture to send 'Harold Hervey' to capture Balisle, and the horror of it staggered me."

"Lee," said Ellen, "understand this; that if I have no word from you within seventy-two, no, forty-eight hours after you get started on this scheme you have in mind, I'm going to get through to Barter somehow. If I put an ad in the paper and tell him where I'm to be found he'll surely make another attempt to take me in. If he's captured you, or uncovered the trap you're laying, then I'll at least be with you. If he kills you he kills me. If we can't live together we can die together."

Bentley kissed her fervently, trying not to think what it would mean to him now if she were in the hands of Caleb Barter. Secretly he intended having Tyler keep her so closely guarded that she couldn't possibly do anything as foolish as she had suggested.

The late evening papers carried another manifesto of the Mind Master to the effect that the remaining eighteen men named on the original list were to be taken before noon of the next day.

Oddly enough eighteen kidnapings were reported from various places in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

"So," thought Bentley, "he's afraid to send out normal apes to capture his eighteen key men. Maybe his control over them is not perfect. That's it, I suppose—he needs human brains before he can exercise perfect control. I suppose Stanley, Morton and Cleve did the kidnapings."

LATE that night Bentley kissed Ellen good-by, told her to keep up her courage, and repaired to the rendezvous arranged for by Thomas Tyler and his surgeon father. In the operating room was the cold body of the anthropoid that had successfully abducted Saret Balisle.

"Young man," said Dr. Tyler, "just what is it you want me to do? I'm not asking for your reasons. Tommy tells me you know what you're doing. I must say though, I don't believe that story of brain transplantation. No doctor would believe it for a minute."

Bentley looked at the dead ape.

"You'll take Tommy's word for it that that ape kidnaped Saret Balisle to-day and took him down the face of a building, sixteen stories to the ground?"

"Of course. Tommy wouldn't string his father."

"Well, part of your surgical work to-night will make it necessary for you to look at that creature's brain. You'll recognize a human brain in that ape's skull. After you've made that discovery, here's what I want you to do: I'll strip to the skin; then I want you to place the skin of that ape on me, so that from top to toes I am an ape. You'll have to do the job so perfectly that I'll *be* an ape—as soon as, under your watchful eye and Tom's, I have mastered all the ape mannerisms the three of us can remember. Can you do it?"

Tyler senior shrugged.

He motioned his son and Bentley to help him lift the huge ape body to the operating table, and under the glaring light above he set to work with instruments which gleamed like molten silver, then became a sullen red. . . .

CHAPTER IX

The Furry Mime

"LISTEN, boys," said Dr. Tyler, after he had removed the skin of the ape, and for a few brief seconds had examined the brain, to shake his head in astonishment, "I've an idea that may help you. It would be impossible for you, Bentley, to play the ape well enough to fool this mad Mind Master. But a hitherto unknown type of ape has just been discovered in Colombia. I read the story of it in a scientific journal to-day. The ape is more manlike than any other known to science. You shall be that ape, brought in during the night by a famous returned explorer. There will be great interest in you now that the story of Saret Balisle's kidnaping has broken. With the attention of New York upon you, certainly your presence will interest Caleb Barter."

Tyler senior rummaged in a pile of papers on his desk and brought forth the story he referred to, which also carried a picture of the Colombian ape.

"It would be impossible for me to change your shape and add to your size sufficiently to make you a real giant anthropoid. You'd have to be twice as deep through the chest; you'd have to have bowed legs as big as small tree trunks; you'd have to have a sloping forehead. No, it's impossible, for I'd have to equip you by padding to an impossible degree, and a scientist would only need to touch you to know you as an imitation ape. But if you are made up as the Colombian ape—"

Bentley quickly interrupted.

"The idea is excellent. I was dubious before about my chances of success, but as an ape of a new species I have a far better chance, and my inevitable human behavior won't be so noticeable."

DR. TYLER measured Bentley as carefully as a tailor, proud of his skill, measures a particular, wealthy customer.

"You will almost suffocate," he said, keeping up a running monolog as his inspired hands worked with forceps and scalpels, "but I can make plenty of air vents in the ape skin which will allow the pores of your skin to breathe. If they are hidden under the hair they will scarcely be noticed, unless of course Barter sees what we are doing here and suspects from the beginning."

"I can stand the discomfort for as long as may prove necessary," said Bentley grimly, conquering a feeling of terror as he already saw himself in the role of an ape, a role previously played in which he had suffered the torments of the damned, "and anything is preferable to the wholesale carnage which Barter is doing. In seventy-two hours he has wrecked the morale of Manhattan. I shall try to get it back. Tyler, will you make every effort to guard the other eighteen men named on the Mind Master's original list?"

"Of course," but Tyler said it dubiously. Barter had proved it almost impossible to outwit him. In their hearts both Bentley and Tyler knew that Barter would make good his boast to take the eighteen men he had named. It seemed a grim price Manhattan must pay to be finally rid of Barter's satanic machinations.

When Bentley, stripped naked, quietly announced his readiness to take his place on the operating table, Tyler senior took a deep breath, like a diver preparing to plunge into icy water, and looked questioningly at Bentley.

"I'm ready, sir," said Bentley quietly. "Let's get on with the task."

Dr. Tyler set to work with amazing, uncanny speed. He had never been more skilful in closing sutures of the flesh in any of his myriad of operations. He was a man inspired as he labored on the task of changing Lee Bentley from a normal human being to a Colombian ape.

WHILE the surgeon worked his son telephoned to the Colombian explorer whose return from Latin-America had been mentioned in the day's news. He couldn't explain anything over the telephone, he said, but would Doctor Jackson come at once to the private offices of James Tyler, surgeon?

Doctor Jackson grumbled, but the urgency in the voice of Tyler convinced him that the thing was important. He promised to be on hand within an hour. It then lacked a few minutes of three o'clock in the morning.

Next, at Bentley's suggestion—and he talked quickly and eagerly to keep his mind off the ordeal he knew he was facing—Tyler got the curator of the Bronx Zoo out of bed and asked him to wait upon Doctor Tyler immediately.

At four o'clock Doctor Jackson and the curator entered the room where Surgeon Tyler had performed a miracle.

Doctor Jackson stepped back in amazement when he noted the man-like ape which leaned with arms folded against one wall of the operating room. His eyes were big with amazement.

He studied Bentley for several minutes, while no one spoke a word.

It was the curator who broke the strained silence.

"So this is your Colombian ape," he said. "I read the news story, but I understood that the ape you had found had been killed in the attempt to capture it."

Surgeon Tyler spoke easily.

"That news story," he said, "was to prevent Doctor Jackson from being annoyed by visitors eager to see his find. As a matter of sober fact Doctor Jackson captured the Colombian ape alive and is now about to turn it over to the zoo. Understand me, Doctor Jackson?"

STILL the explorer said nothing. For a moment longer he stared at Bentley; then he walked over to him.

"The hair is different," he said as though talking to himself. "The Colombian ape's hair is of a slightly finer texture. But that could be explained away as I allowed only the merest bit of information to the reporters to-day. I can add a supplementary story in the next newspaper which will explain that the coarse fur of the Colombian ape is the only thing about it which makes it resemble a giant anthropoid."

Jackson had walked to Bentley without fear and ran his fingers through the hair as he spoke.

"I know it's a man, and some surgeon has performed a miracle," he said. "Just what is it you wish me to do?"

"You've read the stories relating to the Mind Master, Doctor?" asked Bentley suddenly. How strangely his voice came from the body of an ape!

"I've read some of them," answered Jackson. "Is this a scheme whereby you hope to trap the Mind Master?"

"Yes."

"Then depend upon me for any assistance I can render. As a scientist I understand fully the power for evil of a mad genius of our class. This Mind Master should be ruthlessly destroyed."

"Thank you," said Bentley, stepping forward. "You know, perhaps, how the Colombian ape behaves, enough that you can coach me how to walk, how to gesture?"

"Certainly. It will take perhaps an hour to prepare you to fill your role creditably."

JACKSON'S face flushed with enthusiasm. He was launched on a task which fired his interest. He was an authority on apes and anything relating to them inspired him.

"Seat yourself on a chair," said Jackson. "The Colombian ape sits upright like a man."

Bentley seated himself as Jackson had bidden him.

"Now spread your legs apart awkwardly, with the knees straight. The Colombian ape doesn't exactly sit on a chair or a rock or a tree, he leans against it in a *half* sitting position."

Bentley quickly assumed the awkward strained position suggested by Jackson.

Jackson stepped up to him and placed Bentley's arms, unbent, so that his fists hung down outside his wide-apart knees, and cupped his fingers so that they seemed perpetually in the act of closing on something.

"You can't possibly take the proper position with your toes," went on Jackson, "for it's beyond a man's ability to curve his toes as he does his hands. The Colombian ape's toes are prehensile."

"Can't you say in your next news story, Doctor," suggested Bentley, "that the Colombian ape, the nearest animal relative of man, seems to be in an advanced stage of evolution. Can you not say that the Colombian ape is by way of losing the use of his toes?"

"Many scientists know that to be untrue," said Jackson, "but perhaps we can help you through your scheme before they begin denying details in the newspapers. Too bad we can't send secret suggestions to all anthropologists that they remain discreetly silent until the mantle of horror is lifted from Manhattan. But of course we can't, since we'd betray ourselves. Our only hope, then, is to work at top speed."

"I am as eager as anyone to finish a particularly horrible task," said Bentley.

UNDER Jackson's instructions Bentley walked up and down the room. His shaggy shadow on the several walls as he turned, marched and countermarched at Jackson's commands, filled Bentley with self-loathing. He found himself repulsive. His body perspired freely impregnating the ape skin with a harsh odor that was biting and terrible in his nostrils. It was sickening. He tried to close his mind to the repulsiveness of what he was doing.

He walked with a swaying, side-to-side gait, something like a sailor's rolling walk, while his arms swung free at his sides as though they merely hung from his body. The Colombian ape walked like that, Jackson said.

"How about the intelligence of the Colombian ape?" asked Bentley.

"We shot the only specimen so far seen by man before we could discover any facts bearing on his intelligence," said Jackson.

"Then you can safely say that he possesses intelligence far beyond that of known apes," said Bentley quickly, "somewhere, let us say, between that of the lowest order of mankind and civilized man."

Jackson nodded his head dubiously.

"It seems," he said unsmilingly, "that I arrived in the United States at exactly the right time! You would have failed signally to convince the Mind Master in the role of an African great ape."

Bentley managed a short laugh. How horribly it came from the lips of an ape!

"I'm not overly superstitious," he said, "but I regard this as a good omen. I feel we're sure to succeed in what we are planning. I think Barter will surely wish to experiment with me if he thinks I am in reality a great ape from Colombia. He'll welcome the chance to examine any ape which so nearly resembles man. I'm an important link in his plan to create a race of supermen. At least that's how we must hope that Barter will estimate the situation when my story is told in to-morrow's papers."

AN hour before dawn Doctor Jackson, weary from his arduous instruction of the equally exhausted Bentley, pronounced Lee a satisfactory "ape."

"Now here's where you come in," said Bentley tiredly to the curator. "I'm to be taken now to a cage in the Bronx. During the rest of to-day you will quietly instruct your attendants that their guard to-night at the zoo must not be too strict. I must be in position to be stolen by the minions of the Mind Master."

Now the full significance of the desperate expedition upon which Bentley was embarking came home to them all. Their faces were white. Bentley shuddered under his ape robe. His mind went catapulting back into the past to the time when he had been Manape. This was much like it, save that all of him was now encased in the accouterments of an ape and he did not suffer the mental hazards which had almost driven him insane when he had been Manape, with the perpetual necessity of keeping close watch over his own human body which had held the brain of an ape.

He stiffened. "I'm ready," he said.

Immediately upon arrival the curator had been asked to have a closed car, quickly walled with a mixture of lead and zinc—which Bentley and Tyler hoped would thwart the spying of Caleb Barter—brought to Tyler's door.

Three or four zoo attendants entered with a cage when Bentley pronounced himself ready. They stared agape at Bentley and their faces went white when he strode toward them upright, like a man.

Bentley would have spoken to reassure them, but Tyler signaled him to keep silent. The zoo attendants might talk and entirely spoil their scheme.

TWO hours later, long before the first crowds began to arrive at the Bronx Zoo, Lee Bentley was driven from his small cage in the car, into a huge cage at the zoo. From a dark corner, in which he crouched as though overcome with fear, he gazed affrightedly out across what he could see of Bronx Park.

"When I used to feed the animals here," he said to himself, "I never expected that the time would come when I myself would be caged—and one of them."

The curator had ridden out with the cage. But, save for making sure of the fastening on the big cage, he paid no heed to Bentley. He treated him, of necessity, as though he were actually the Colombian ape he pretended to be. From now on until he succeeded or failed, Lee Bentley was an ape from the jungles of Latin-America.

Just before the crowds could reasonably be expected to begin arriving, curious to see this strange thing Doctor Jackson had brought from Colombia, an attendant arrived with a freshly painted sign.

"Colombian Great Ape," it read, "Presented to Bronx Zoo by Doctor Claude Jackson."

It seemed to close entirely behind Lee Bentley the vast door which separated the apes from civilization. Miserably he crouched in his corner and awaited the coming of the curious.

CHAPTER X

Grim Anticipation

A NUMBING fear began to grow upon Lee Bentley as the ordeal of waiting began.

Naturally he could not eat the food given usually to apes and of course he could not be seen calmly eating bacon and eggs with knife and fork. And because he couldn't eat he was assailed by a dreadful hunger, which, however, he managed to fight down partially. He smiled inwardly as he looked ahead and understood that despite the warnings not to feed the animals, children of all ages, from four years to sixty, would surreptitiously toss peanuts and walnuts into his cage.

He felt a little hopeful about it. They would at least allay his hunger.

But no, he could not do that, either. Nobody had thought to ask Doctor Jackson how a Colombian ape manipulated his food. Even a certain clumsiness in that respect might start questions which would cause the public to doubt the authenticity of Jackson's find.

Bentley decided to sulk. The ape he was supposed to be could reasonably he expected to resent captivity and would probably go on a hunger strike. He would do likewise and be in character if he starved.

He crouched in a far corner as the first comers began to arrive. They were fathers and mothers with their children, and the older people carried, usually, newspapers under their arms. Bentley wished with all his soul that he could see one of the papers close enough to read the headlines.

However, when the crowd was not too thick, Bentley waddled nearer to the wire mesh which separated him from the curious crowd and through lids which were half closed as though he slept, he managed to glimpse a few excerpts from the paper:

"Police department redoubling their precautions to prevent Mind Master from capturing eighteen intended victims."

"Hideout of Mind Master still undiscovered. When will the public be delivered from the stupidity of the police?"

"Doctor Jackson returns from Colombia, bringing a living specimen of an ape hitherto unknown to civilized man, but more like him than any ape hitherto known. Visitors may see the creature to-day in the Bronx Zoo."

THAT was the story which had brought out the visitors who were forming, moment by moment, a bigger crowd before Bentley's cage. Bentley managed a glimpse of a woman's wrist-watch after what seemed an age of trying to do so without his intention becoming plain to the too bright children who crowded as close to the cage as attendants would permit. It was ten o'clock. It would be at least twelve more hours before Bentley could reasonably expect any action on the part of Barter. Barter would now be concentrating on his plans to kidnap the eighteen men he had first named.

Bentley tried to make the time pass faster by imagining what Barter would be doing. By now his labors must be titanic. He must have separate controls for each of his minions, and there were many times when he must control several at one time, thus making his task akin to that of a man trying to look two ways at once, while he rolled a cigarette with one hand and shined his shoes with the other. Certainly the concentration required was enormous.

Yet, no matter how complicated became his puzzle, Barter was its master because he was its creator, and Bentley hadn't the slightest doubt that, until someone actually penetrated Barter's stronghold, he would not be stopped.

Bentley knew that at the very first opportunity he would destroy Caleb Barter as he would have destroyed a mad dog or stamped to death a deadly snake. The life of one man would rest lightly upon his conscience, if that man were Caleb Barter.

Perhaps, though, he could learn many of Barter's secrets before he destroyed him. Properly used they might prove boons to mankind. It was only the use Barter was putting them to that threatened to fill the world with horror and bloodshed.

"MAMA, why don't he eat?"

"Hush," said a woman, as though afraid the Colombian ape would hear and become angry; "don't annoy the creature. He looks fully capable of coming right out at us."

But the child who had been admonished began to juggle a bag of peanuts which he managed to throw into the cage. Bentley stooped forward, sniffing suspiciously at the sack, while a wave of hunger made him feel weak and giddy for a moment. He just realized that he hadn't eaten for almost twenty-four hours. His time had been so filled with action and excitement that there hadn't been opportunity.

"I hope," he said to himself, in an effort to drive away thoughts of food, "that Tyler will take every precaution to prevent Ellen from doing something foolish."

Knowing that he could no longer communicate with her, could no longer be absolutely sure that she was still out of Barter's clutches, he suffered agonies of fear for her safety.

"If Barter places a hand on her I'll tear his skin from his carcass, bit by bit!" he said, unconsciously clenching his fists.

"Oh, look, mama, he's shuttin' his fists as though he wanted to fight somebody! I'll bet he could whip Dempsey, couldn't he, mama?"

"Perhaps he could, son. Hush now, and watch him. There's a good boy!"

It brought Bentley sharply back to his surroundings and proved to him that he must not allow his mind to go wool-gathering if he did not wish to give himself away. What if, in an access of anger, he happened to speak his thoughts aloud? He could imagine the amazement of the crowd.

THE day wore on.

At noon a strange horror seemed to travel over the Bronx Zoo, and within a short time every last visitor had precipitately departed. Bentley could now safely approach the wire mesh and look out and around over a wider radius.

Right under the wire mesh was a newspaper someone had thrown away.

By pressing tightly against the mesh Bentley could see the headlines.

"Mind Master successful on all counts!"

So that's what had turned the crowd to stony silence with very fear? They had all fled, wondering who would be next. Bentley had heard the shouting of the extra on the distant streets, but it had been so far away he hadn't heard the words. One solitary newspaper had appeared among the Bronx crowd and the story it carried under startling scareheads had passed from brain to brain as though by magic . . . and the crowd had fled.

Bentley stared down at the newspaper in horror, a horror that was in no way mitigated by his having fully expected Barter to succeed. Mutually, with no words having been spoken to express the thought, Tyler and Bentley had conceded to Barter the eighteen victims he had named.

Nothing could be done to stop him. His brains were greater than the combined wisdom of the city of New York.

What else was in that paper?

Bentley stared at it for an hour, and finally a vagrant breeze, for which he had hoped and prayed during that hour, whipped across the park and stirred the paper. He read more headlines.

"Lee Bentley disappears! Believed kidnaped or slain by Mind Master!"

How had that story got out? Surely Tyler would have kept that from the press. Following on the heels of the Colombian ape story, Barter would almost surely put two and two together to arrive at the proper total.

BENTLEY read on:

"Ellen Estabrook, fiancée of Lee Bentley, disappears mysteriously from her hotel room. Guarded by a score of police, not one has yet been found who knows anything of her disappearance or saw her leave. Nobody seems to have seen anyone go to her room or leave it. Our police department must have fallen on evil days indeed when twenty crack plain-clothes men cannot keep one woman under surveillance."

Something was radically wrong, but Bentley could not piece the whole story together, simply because he had been out of touch for so many hours that the thread of it had slipped from his fingers.

Suddenly Bentley noticed that a solitary man was watching him curiously, a dawning amazement in his face. Bentley roused himself and saw that he was standing against the mesh, fingers hooked into it above his head, his weight on his left leg, his right foot crossed over his left, his head thoughtfully bowed.

To the amazed man yonder the "Colombian ape" must have looked remarkably like a condemned man clutching the bars of his cell, awaiting the coming of the executioner.

Bentley recovered himself and sat down on the floor of the cage in the loose easy manner an ape would have used.

He forced himself to sit thus until evening, when the last curious one vanished from the park and darkness began to fall.

Then excitement at the approach of a hoped for denouement began to rise in his heart like a rushing tide.

Would Barter fall for the ruse? Or did he already know that the Colombian ape was Lee Bentley?

In either case, Bentley thought, the Mind Master would take action during the first hours of darkness. Bentley was gambling desperately on what he knew to be characteristic of Caleb Barter.

CHAPTER XI

In the Dead of Night

BENTLEY knew that if Ellen were in the hands of Caleb Barter the mad professor would probably do her no harm, but use her as a club against Bentley, and through Bentley, the Manhattan police. He did not believe that the Mind Master would consider performing the brain operation on Ellen. Caleb Barter's scheme seemed to consider only men, and men of substance.

No, Ellen would not be harmed, he felt, but that made him feel no easier, knowing that she might be in the hands of Barter.

How could he know of Naka Machi, and the refined vengeance of the Mind Master?

The last visitors had left the park and comparative quiet settled over the zoo. Save for the sounds of animals feeding and the occasional cursing voices of attendants there were no sounds. Not since Bentley had taken his place in the cage had anyone spoken to him. He had never felt so lonely and uncertain in his life.

Now there was utter darkness and silence.

And then before his cage appeared a tiny spot of light. If Barter's minions expected to deal with a powerful ape they would come prepared to subdue him by whatever means seemed necessary. Bentley had no wish to be injured, and yet he must make some show of resistance in order to allay any possible suspicion that he *wished* to be stolen.

There was a faint gnawing sound at the wire outside the cage. Mice might have made that sound, sharpening their teeth on the wire. Bentley decided to feign sleep. Had Barter come personally to supervise his capture? That didn't seem reasonable as Barter must realize that all his effectiveness depended upon his ability to retain control of whatever organization he might have built up—and his central control must be his hideout.

Then he would be sending some of his puppets to get Bentley.

Would they be apes with men's brains? Impossible. Apes could not travel from place to place without attracting attention, especially if they traveled unguarded and went casually to a given destination as men would go. No, if his puppets were not men in the normal meaning, then they were "apemen."

THE wire came softly down. Bentley hoped that no attendant might come blundering around now to spoil everything. His heart pounded with excitement.

At last he was going to see Caleb Barter again at close quarters.

"I shall destroy him," he told himself.

The shadowy outlines of two men came through the severed wires. Bentley still pretended to be asleep. He wondered if Barter's televisory equipment included any arrangements permitting him to see in the dark, and knew instantly that it did. How else could these two puppets have come so unerringly to the proper cage in Bronx Park?

No, Bentley did not dare allow himself to be taken easily in the hope that his actions would pass unnoticed.

But he waited until the ropes began to fall about him, testing the strength of his adversaries by mental measurement. By their uncertain, hesitating actions he knew that he dealt only with the *forms* of men—forms which were ruled by brains which had not in themselves intelligence enough to perform the acts they were now performing. Ape brains in the skull-pans of men. The brains in themselves were only important because they were living matter which was being used as a sensory sounding board by which Caleb Barter, the Mind Master, transmitted his commands to the arms and legs and bodies of his puppets.

Bentley sprang into action. He growled and snarled at the two men who were trying to take him. Only two men? Surely Barter would have sent more than two men to take a great ape! He knows I'm not a true ape, thought Bentley. He's giving me a challenge. He knows I wish to get to his hideout and he is making sure that I get there.

But Bentley was only guessing. Calmness descended upon him as he realized that he was soon to face a crucial test.

JUST now, however, he struck out at the two men who were striving to bind him. They were husky chaps, and one of them packed the wallop of a real fighter. Neither man said a word to him, and when his own hands clawed at them—how would he dare strike out with his fists?—the men made queer animal sounds in their throats. Bentley could well remember how helpless, hopeless and lost he had felt when his brain had been in the skull-pan of Manape.

The brain of an ape could not be a terribly intelligent instrument in the first place. What thoughts, if apes had thoughts at all, coursed through an ape brain which found itself inside a human skull?

The answer to that was simple: only such thoughts as Barter originated and transmitted through the mental sounding board. After all, the material of the human brain and the ape brain were perhaps very much alike, and Barter was working on a sound scientific principle in making a sounding board of an ape's brain.

Bentley shuddered through the fur that covered him. Knowing the sort of creatures with which he had to deal—men in all things save their intelligence—made him tremble with nausea. Such grim, ghastly hybrids. But he stopped shuddering when he recalled that he still dealt with men after all—at least with one man, Caleb Barter. When he thought of these two "apemen" as separate entities of a human being of many personalities—Caleb Barter—he was able to plan some method by which to deal with them.

So now he fought, seemingly with the utmost savagery, to keep them from binding him with ropes. Even as he fought, however, he fancied he could hear the grim chuckling of Caleb Barter. What did Barter know?

Bentley knew that eventually he would discover the truth.

IN struggling against the two "men" his hands encountered the knobs on their heads—the tiny metal balls protruding from the top of the skull at the point where, in babies, the head remains soft during babyhood. He could have broken connection with Barter for these two by jerking the controls free. And then what? He would never get through to Barter and would release in Bronx

Park two men whose strange type of madness, when they were discovered, would startle the countryside. Two men with the savagery of anthropoid apes! He shuddered as he carefully refrained from disturbing those balls.

At last Bentley was quite securely bound, only his lower limbs remaining free so that he could walk, though the length of his steps was strictly limited. His hands were entirely and securely bound, and the significance of this fact did not escape him. Barter knew that he did not need his hands to aid him in walking! Of course the newspaper story released by Doctor Jackson had reported the Colombian ape as being able to walk exactly like a man.

But that didn't prevent Bentley from nursing the suspicion that Barter already *knew*. Even if he did, it could in no wise alter the determination of Bentley. His task was to penetrate the hideout of Barter—and he was on the way there now.

WITH little attempt at concealment the two men led Bentley to a long black closed car outside the park. They met no one. The two men avoided discovery with uncanny ease. Bentley thrilled with excitement. He felt he knew approximately where Barter's hideout was.

It was useless to speculate, however; time would show it to him.

Bentley was tossed into the tonneau of the car. His two captors, moving with the precision of men in a trance, took their places in the front seat. Bentley struggled for a time against his bonds. He wanted to sit up and peer out, to see what way they took so that he would know where he was when he reached Barter's hideout. But of course, even if he shook his bonds free he did not dare rise to a sitting position, for to control the intricate handling of his two puppets, Barter's attention must have been pretty carefully fixed upon this car.

So Bentley contented himself with waiting.

Lying on his back on the floor of the car he tried to see what he could through the car windows. He knew when he was carried under an elevated system by the crashing roar of trains over his head. He knew he was being carried downtown, but he wasn't sure that this was the Sixth Avenue elevated.

How could he find out the road they were traveling without sitting up and looking at street signs?

HE felt he didn't dare do that. He'd be as careful as possible on the off-chance that Barter really believed him a Colombian ape, when the benefit of surprise would be with Bentley.

The car progressed downtown at a normal speed. It stopped for red lights and obeyed all other traffic regulations. Barter was taking no chance on losing more of his puppets.

Bentley suddenly gasped with horror as he remembered something. Eighteen important men of Manhattan had been kidnaped that day by Caleb Barter. Would Bentley be forced to watch the mad professor perform the eighteen inevitable operations?

Perspiration poured from every pore as he visualized the horror he might be compelled to witness when he was finally taken into Barter's hideout. The ape skin clung to him as though it were actually his own. There were even moments when Bentley feared that it might grow to him.

But he put the feeling of horror from him with the thought that if Ellen were in Barter's power, Barter might even be forcing her to anesthetize for him while he performed his grisly slaughter.

Bentley's courage returned and now it seemed to him that the journey would never end, so eager was he to discover whether or not Ellen had eluded the hands of the Mind Master.

CHAPTER XII

A Woman of Courage

CALEB BARTER smiled warmly at the woman who had come to him almost as though in answer to a prayer. He admired her flashing eyes and the lifted chin which spoke of pride and courage.

"I had thought of improving the feminine strain of the race also," he told her, but almost as though he spoke to himself, "but I realized that it mattered little the stature of the mothers of the race so long as the fathers were made virile. But if all women were like yourself, Miss Estabrook, the race would not require the improvement it is now my duty to bestow upon it."

Ellen stared directly into the eyes of the white-haired old man. As she looked at him she found it hard to believe that one so gentle from outward appearances had such a vast, grim power for evil. In repose his face was kindly, though there was something out of character in the fact that it was so apple rosy. And his lips were far too red.

"Where," she said quietly, fearlessly, "is Lee Bentley?"

Barter raised his eyebrows as he stared back at her. So far she had not looked around at this great room into which he had had her conducted; she had seemed interested only in her mission, whatever that might be.

"You mean that delightfully rude young man?" he asked sardonically.

"You know well enough whom I mean! Where is he?"

"Then he is not to be found in his usual haunts?"

"He has disappeared."

"And you come out seeking Professor Barter because Bentley has disappeared! It is almost as though you had previously arranged with him to come seeking me if, at a certain time, he failed to return from some mysterious rendezvous. . . ."

BARTER'S face was now a mask of uncanny shrewdness. In a few words he had pierced through Ellen's secret of why she had deliberately placed herself in the way of Barter's minions in order to be taken, and now he had used the words of her own questions to form a weapon against her. Ellen gasped in terror.

Had she made a hideous mistake? Had she, by failing to wait for word from Bentley, ruined all his well laid plans?

Barter now stood before her, his eyes almost shooting fire.

"Tell me quickly," he began, and for a second she thought he would put his hands on her, "what sort of plan is he making to betray me into the hands of my enemies, who are the enemies of super-civilization because they are my enemies?"

"I know of nothing," said Ellen stoutly, hoping that she had not, after all, betrayed the fact that she knew Bentley had started to work out an unusual scheme. The details she didn't know, for Lee hadn't told her. "But I do know, what all the world knows, that he was helping the police against you. Naturally, then, when he vanished I thought of you. Besides you had already warned him that you would remove him in your own good time. He caused you the loss of two of your puppets and I thought, naturally enough, that you would try to remove him to some place where he could not operate so successfully against you."

"That's all?" queried Barter eagerly. "You don't know of some special scheme that has been worked out to trap me?"

"I know of no scheme. Now that I am in your hands, Professor, what do you intend doing with me?"

Barter stared at Ellen for several minutes.

"I haven't captured Bentley . . . yet," he said at last, slowly, "but I shall—no doubt about that. It is inevitable—as inevitable as Caleb Barter. I can use him in my labors for humanity. How I treat him after he is taken depends somewhat on you. You may therefore consider yourself a sort of hostage. I have much medical work to perform. Have you ever been a nurse?"

ELLEN recoiled in horror.

"You don't mean you would ask me to help you perform those horrible—" She stopped abruptly before her sudden tendency to hysterics should make her say things to anger Barter too far.

"So," he said quickly, "you think my brain operations are horrible, eh? Well, you shall see that they are not horrible; that Professor Barter, the greatest scientist the world has ever produced, is really preparing to prevent civilization from utterly decaying."

"And afterward?" asked Ellen. "I know that eventually you will be taken and that the people will destroy you, tear you limb from limb. But you will never believe that. Tell me, then, what you plan to do with me."

For a brief time he considered the matter.

"I am an old man," he said at last, musingly, "but I am young in spirit and in body. It would be amusing to have a mate—but no, no, that would not do! The destiny of Caleb Barter is not linked with a woman. You would simply hold me back. However, I have often been interested in miscegenation and its effect on the race if properly guided. My assistant Naka Machi, is one of the finest specimens of his race. Perhaps I shall arrange for you to mate with him, under conditions which I shall dictate, in order to experiment with your offspring . . . ."

Ellen swayed, her face going dead white. She hadn't yet met Naka Machi, but his name told her enough. The thought of a Japanese, however, was far less repellent than the cold, calm way in which Barter spoke of using the offspring of such a union.

"I'll kill myself at the first opportunity," said Ellen suddenly.

BARTER put his forefinger under Ellen's chin in a paternal fashion. His eyes looked deeply into hers. She thought of what his fingers had done in the past . . . those long slender fingers. His touch made her shudder.

But his eyes held her. They seemed like deep wells. Then they were like black coals advancing upon her out of the darkness, growing bigger and bigger as they came, with little flames in their centers also growing as they approached.

"You will submit your will to mine," said the soft voice of Caleb Barter.

His right hand was making swift snakelike movements back of Ellen's head. His voice droned on, but already it seemed to Ellen to come from a vast distance.

"Your min[illegible]ill be concerned only with the welfare of Caleb Barter," droned on the voice. "You will think only of Caleb Barter; your greatest desire will be to serve him. There is nothing you would not do for him. Let your objective mind sleep until Caleb Barter wakens it; give your subjective mind into my keeping."

Beads of perspiration broke out on the cheeks of Caleb Barter as he worked quickly to place the girl entirely under his skilled hypnosis. At last she stood like a statue, her wide-open eyes staring into space, straight ahead. She did not move. She scarcely seemed to breathe.

"You will know that my home is your home, Ellen," said Barter softly. "You will feel that you are welcome here and that you love this place. It needs the attention of a loving woman; you will give it that attention. But you will be subservient always to my will. You will enter upon your duties."

Ellen Estabrook sighed softly as though with relief. Her hands went up to remove her hat, which she placed on a chair in a corner of the hellish laboratory. She removed her light coat and arranged her hair with skilled fingers. But even as she moved around the room of the long table her eyes stared vacantly into space. She was as much a puppet of Caleb Barter as were Stanley, Morton and Cleve. But, mercifully, she did not know it.

BARTER studied her for several moments; his eyes squinted. He was making sure that she was not duping him with pretense. Satisfied at last he turned his eyes away from her. He stepped to the porcelain slab set in the bronze wall of his laboratory and looked at the push-buttons marked "C-3" and "E-5". The red lights were on, indicating that the two puppets controlled by these two keys were returning toward their master. The lights had been green when Barter had begun his conversation with Ellen Estabrook, indicating that the two puppets were still going away. With a tremendous effort of will he had given them sufficient mental stimulus to keep them traveling without his direct will for the few minutes he would require for Ellen.

Now, however, he quickly donned the metal cap and the little ball, and inserted into the orifice in his cap the swinging key which connected by chain with the key which fitted into the slot under the button marked "C-3".

He had returned to his puppets just in time. "C-3" was Cleve, who was driving the car sent out to bring in the Colombian ape. As Barter got in touch with the car it narrowly averted a crash with a police car . . . and the perspiration broke forth afresh on the body of Barter as he resumed control of his puppets.

The second creature, in the front seat of the car, was Morton, and it didn't matter particularly about him as he was not driving. But Morton was now becoming all ape. Barter did not wish to use any more of his mental energy than was necessary. He contented himself by sending his will into Cleve, who began at once to drive like a master. Whenever Morton, beside him, showed an inclination to jump out of the car or otherwise interfere with Cleve in his work, Barter had but to express the thought, and Cleve either pulled him back to his place beside him, or gave him a walnut from his pocket.

BARTER could as easily have had them change places, since he assumed control of either at will, or could have controlled a score simultaneously. But that would have required additional thought stimulus, and he wished to conserve his mental energies for the work which yet faced him.

Once he switched his attention from the heliotube which controlled Cleve—and through which, concurrently, he saw everything that transpired near Cleve, because his televisory apparatus and his radio control were co-workers on almost identical vibratory waves—to the area of Manhattan immediately surrounding his own neighborhood.

"Hmm," he said to himself, "the police are getting too close. As soon as I have completed my labors tonight I shall destroy some of them as a warning to others to keep their distance."

Morton and Cleve drew up to the curb while Barter watched carefully on all sides, through the heliotube, to make sure that their arrival was unmarked by the police.

They climbed out quickly and raced across the sidewalk to the green gate which gave on a gloomy old court, inside which they were swallowed by the shadows from all eyes save those of Caleb Barter.

Five minutes after the strange trio had entered the "place," the great chrome-steel door of Barter's laboratory swung open.

"Morton and Cleve, my master," announced Naka Machi, bowing low and sucking in his breath with a hissing sound.

Barter's own puppets entered with the ape between them.

Barter walked fearlessly forward. He had slipped the key from the orifice atop his head. Morton and Cleve now stood listlessly, dumbly, looking with dead eyes at their master. Barter tossed them several walnuts each.

Then he turned his attention to the ape, rubbing his hands together with pleasure.

But the ape was behaving strangely. His eyes were staring past Barter. His hands sought to lift as though he would hold them out to someone; but the ropes prevented him. Barter turned to look. Ellen Estabrook stood beyond him, white of face, motionless as a statue. The ape was straining toward her.

Caleb Barter chuckled with understanding.

"Good evening, Lee," he said gently. "I've been expecting you!"

CHAPTER XIII

Where the Bodies Went

BENTLEY had been bound carelessly. Who could expect ape brains to devise clever bonds, even when controlled by Caleb Barter? And now it seemed that Caleb Barter had known all along; he said he had been expecting Bentley. No, that wasn't it. Barter had seen him yearning toward Ellen Estabrook, statuesque and wide-eyed on the other side of the room. If it hadn't been for the presence of Ellen he might have been accepted as an ape. Now it made little difference.

But his bonds were not tightly drawn. He found himself fighting them fiercely, trying to get his hands on Caleb Barter. He could see the scrawny Adam's apple of the mad scientist, and his fingers itched to press themselves into the flesh.

Caleb Barter stood his ground calmly. "Naka Machi," he said softly.

Suddenly Bentley felt a dull, paralyzing blow on his skull. He knew it had been intended to render him utterly unconscious. But Naka Machi hadn't taken into consideration that his skull was protected by the hide of an ape. He remembered, as he stumbled and fell forward, that the Japanese were wizards with their hands. That's why Naka Machi could knock him down, render him helpless, yet leave his brain as clearly active as before. Perhaps clearer, even, for now his brain did not act on his legs and arms, which were helpless.

Bentley felt as he imagined a patient on the operating table might feel when not given sufficient anesthetic, yet given enough to make him incapable of speech or movement. Such a patient would hear the soft discussions of the surgeons, see them prepare their instruments, yet be unable to tell them that he wasn't entirely unconscious.

BARTER stooped over Bentley and rolled back the lids of his eyes.

"Good, Naka Machi!" he said. "He won't be in any position to do us an injury. Remain powerless, Lee Bentley, but retain your knowledge."

Barter, then, was familiar with the strange hypnosis which the blow of Naka Machi's hand had put upon Bentley. Barter had taken advantage of it to add to it a sort of mental paralysis, so that the condition would continue.

"You are in my hands, Lee," he said in paternal fashion, "but you can do me no harm. Since you were associated with me in the first of my great experiments you know much about me. I have never ceased to hope that you would one day understand and appreciate what I am doing for humanity and be brought to aid me. Perhaps if I force you to watch my efforts you will understand them and sympathize with my ambitions."

Bentley could say nothing. Barter's eyes seemed to leap at him growing large and glaring, just as the eyes of caricatured animals leap at the camera in trick motion pictures. Physically he was powerless. Only his brain was active.

"Remove this covering from him, Naka Machi," went on Barter. "Remove his bonds. You are about his size. Garb him in some of your own clothing."

Bentley had the odd feeling that he didn't need to turn his head to see things around him. His head felt huge, almost to bursting, and his eyes felt huge, too, so that he could see in all directions, as though his eyeballs had been fish-eye lenses.

HE studied Naka Machi. A nasty opponent in a fight, he decided. He hadn't figured on any opponent other than Barter. This man was almost as great. The skill of his fingers as he quickly removed the ape skin from Bentley, using scalpels taken from Barter's table, amazed Bentley with their miraculous dexterity. He cleaned Bentley's body with some solution in a sponge and clothed him in some of his own clothing which fitted fairly well.

Then he lifted Bentley from the floor and stood him against the wall.

Bentley was unbound. He tried to lift his hands but they refused to move. His feet, too, seemed anchored to the floor. His knees were stiff and straight. He might as well have been a wooden image for all his ability to get about.

Now Barter spoke

"Come here, Lee," he said.

Bentley was amazed at the kindliness in Barter's attitude. He dealt with Bentley as though he had been his son. He felt that Barter genuinely liked him. It was rather amazing. Barter liked him but would remove him without compunction if he thought it necessary.

Bentley found he could move his feet, or rather they seemed to move of their own volition, as he crossed the room to stand before Barter.

"I'm rather proud of what I have been able to do, Lee," went on Barter, "and I am now entirely safe from the police. I've issued another manifesto telling the public that for each attempt made against me, one of the eighteen men captured by me today will die. Manhattan is the abode of terror. Here, see for yourself."

He extended to Bentley what seemed to be a pair of binoculars, but with the ear-hooks common to ordinary spectacles. He set them over Bentley's eyes and set them in place.

"Now you can survey New York as you wish."

BENTLEY looked for a moment or two. Sixth Avenue was a deserted highway, on which red and green lights blinked off and on in the usual routine, signaling to drivers who were non-existent. There were vistas of deserted streets and avenues. There were some few living things—policemen in uniform, standing in pairs and larger groups, all concentrated in an area covering no more than twenty acres, which twenty acres included the hideout of Caleb Barter. Bentley knew that the hideout was under Millegan Place. He had recognized it coming in. A secret panel in a brick wall had opened to show a door where none was apparent. Then a circular stairway leading down into darkness to the room which Barter had gouged out of the earth and turned into a laboratory of hell.

[illegible] the police?" asked Barter. "They know now where I am, but they are helpless because of my hostages. I shall now begin the operations I believe to be necessary. Then I shall issue another manifesto, telling the public that I am safeguarded by great apes whose ability will prove the correctness of my theory about the possibility of creating a race of supermen. My manifesto shall say that my apes must not be slain. It shall say that for every ape slain by the police one of my eighteen hostages will die."

Bentley would have gasped with horror, but he could not. Now he saw Thomas Tyler, his face a white mask of despair, in the midst of his helpless men.

"I'll give you a hand, somehow, Tommy," Bentley whispered deep down inside him.

"Now you shall see what I do, Lee," said Caleb Barter. "Naka Machi, bring the ape skin you took from my friend. Bentley, you will follow us."

BARTER removed the strange glasses from Bentley's eyes, blotting out the deserted streets and avenues of Manhattan. Naka Machi followed behind Bentley, carrying the ape skin in which Bentley had penetrated the stronghold of Caleb Barter.

The chrome-steel door swung silently back and the three entered another room filled with blazing light. Without being able to look back Bentley knew that Ellen, white of face and staring, followed at their heels.

There was a long white operating table in this room, and a smaller chrome-steel door set some four feet above the floor in one wall.

"Naka Machi, the incineration tube," said Barter brusquely.

Naka Machi stepped to the operating table and dug into one of the drawers. He brought out a white tube, closed at one end, about an inch in diameter, eight inches in length, and snowy white.

"Concentrated fire, Bentley," said Barter. "Watch!"

Barter had Naka Machi cast the ape skin through the small steel door, beyond which Bentley could see a boxlike space large enough to accommodate two or three grown men, lying side by side at full length. It seemed to be indirectly lighted. The ape skin dropped on the floor of this compartment. Barter took the "incineration tube" and directed it on the skin. Bentley heard the clicking of a button.

The ape skin charred quickly, folded up, drew into itself, disappeared—and a fine gray ash settled on the floor of the compartment, like rain from the roof of the ghastly little space.

"Now you understand that I have solved the problem of disposing of the cumbersome useless bodies of my hostages, Lee," said Barter, rubbing his hands together as though he washed them.

Bentley's heart leaped as Naka Machi placed the incineration tube on the operating table. It was close enough that Bentley could have reached it, had he not been utterly powerless to move.

"Naka Machi," said Barter. "Bring me ape D-4 and Frank Keller, the diplomat. Ellen, clear the operating table. Quickly, now! Bentley, stand against the wall and do not move—but miss nothing I do."

CHAPTER XIV

The Straining Prison

THEN began a grim series of activities which combined to form a nightmare Bentley was never to forget, even as he prayed within him that no slightest memory of it would remain in the brain of Ellen Estabrook.

Naka Machi went back to the room

which Bentley had first entered and returned almost at once with a tall thin man, immaculately garbed in gray, wearing a spade beard. His eyes were flashing fires of anger and of pride.

He stared at Barter.

"What is all this quackery?" he demanded. "Who is responsible for this unspeakable rigmarole?"

"Your words are harsh, Mr. Keller," said Barter suavely, "and you shall learn in good time what I intend. Had you followed my manifestoes in the news columns you would have known what I intend. I shall create a race of super—"

"You will at once release myself and the others with me," interrupted Keller.

But at that moment Naka Machi returned, leading a great ape which seemed as docile as though it had been drugged. Naka Machi raised his right hand quickly, so quickly Bentley could scarce follow the movement, and with the edge of his palm struck the tall gray man in back of the head. Keller's knees buckled. As he started to fall NakaMachi stepped close to him, gathered him in his arms and bore him to the table.

At Barter's swift instructions Ellen Estabrook, all unknowing, placed a cone indicated by Barter over the mouth and nose of Keller. Naka Machi struck the ape as he had struck the man, but he waited until he had persuaded the brute to take his place on the table near Keller's head.

THE ape sprawled. Naka Machi quickly twisted both Keller and the ape around so that their heads were toward each other, their feet pointing in opposite directions.

"Is that close enough my master?" came the soft voice of Naka Machi.

"Quite," said Barter, whose face was now a mask of concentration. "Cleve and Stanley and Morton?"

"They have been locked in their cages, my master," said Naka Machi. "Are you sure this man who came in the guise of an ape is safe?"

"I shall make sure. But do you remain close where you can render him harmless in case I have misjudged him."

Naka Machi turned baleful eyes on Bentley. The latter could see the hatred in them and for a moment was at loss to understand it.

"I shall destroy him before he can put his hands upon you, my master," said Naka Machi.

"I do not wish him destroyed, Naka Machi," replied Barter. "That is enough of the anesthetic, Miss Estabrook. Naka Machi, my instruments, quickly."

Before he proceeded with his labors Barter stood in front of Bentley and stared at him for a moment. Bentley felt the strength flow out of him under the gaze of this man—a gaze he could not avoid. Barter smiled slightly.

"You will eventually join me of your own free will, Lee," he said softly.

"I would rather die a thousand deaths!" screamed Bentley, but the sound of his scream echoed and reechoed through his soul without coming out so that Barter could hear it.

BARTER'S confidence in his ability to convert Bentley was assuredly a mark of his twisted mind, for he must surely have realized that Bentley would be the most injured by his schemes. But he seemed to associate him with the days of Manape, when Barter had proved to himself, to Bentley and Ellen Estabrook, that the operation he now planned in wholesale proportions was possible. Bentley could understand why Barter regarded him as a friend and colleague, and his animosity temporary —because as a subject of his first great experiment Bentley was a symbol of Barter's success.

Strange how easy it was to find logic in the reasoning of madmen, and to understand that logic!

Barter sprang back to his task.

"Naka Machi," he said, "take heed that you serve me well. Do you like this woman?"

"Yes, my master."

"If you continue in your loyalty to me, I shall give her to you."

Bentley's mind recoiled with horror. The shock of this cold statement was like another blow on the head. He wanted to leap forward and set strangling fingers about the neck of Naka Machi. Ordinarily Naka Machi could handle him with ease, but now that Bentley had heard the plan of Barter, he could have handled the Japanese with superhuman strength. But he could not move. He strained against the bodily lethargy which held him prisoner. If only he could move forward and grasp the incineration tube, he would turn it on Naka Machi and Barter. . . .

But he could not move, could not fight off the lethargy which was like invincible prison walls around him.

He could move the tips of his fingers, he discovered . . . but no more than that. The shock of Barter's calm statement had cast off that much of his semi-hypnotic lethargy. A minute before he hadn't been able even to move his fingers.

GIVE him time, he told himself, while inwardly he bled as he struggled desperately to throw off the grim hypnosis, and he would yet manage to save the lives of at least some of the eighteen, see that Ellen won free, and destroy this hell-hole under Millegan Place.

Now incredibly slender instruments were busy near the heads of the two on the operating table—the ape and Keller, the doomed man. As the knives and scalpels leaped to their work with startling dexterity and amazing speed, Bentley strained again against his horrid invisible prison. If only he could save this man Keller from this horror . . . but it was useless.

The fingers of Barter worked swiftly over the skull of the ape, first. Naka Machi stood on one side of the long table, Ellen on the other, near Barter. Bentley studied her face as the skull of the ape fell open under the hands of Barter, and he knew she was unaware of what she was doing. Bentley had expected a crimson horror, but nothing of the kind developed. Could Barter read his thoughts?

"I am an adept at bloodless surgery, Bentley," he said, while his fingers never ceased their swift manipulations.

Now Naka Machi held the skull-pan of the ape, from which he had removed the reddish substance which was the ape's brain. This Naka Machi had tossed into the aperture where the ape skin had been destroyed.

The empty skull-pan of the ape awaited the brain of Keller.

Bentley could feel the sweat burst forth on him in every pore as he tried to throw off his awful inertia, to go to the aid of Keller. If Barter should see the perspiration on his cheeks. . .

Bentley thought of Samson in the midst of his enemies, blind and beaten, of how he had prayed to be given strength to pull down the pillars of the temple. . . .

"Oh God," said Bentley to himself, "only this once give me strength to throw off these chains. Grant that I do something to save the man from this horror."

BUT he could still move only the tips of his fingers when Barter had finally closed the sutures in the skull-pan of the ape, renewing again the ape's skull, with the brain of Keller inside. Keller was finished. He had not moved on the table. Even his chest stood still, stark and lifeless. Barter had not troubled to restore

Keller's skull-pan. What was the need?

Naka Machi gathered up the carcass of Keller and bore it swiftly to the boxlike hole in the wall of the ghastly room. . . .

He thrust it in. He stepped back and caught up the incineration tube of concentrated fire . . . and Bentley saw the body of the murdered man shrivel up so quickly it seemed as though it had dissolved before his eyes. Down from the ceiling of the hell-hole dropped the fine gray ash, all that remained—save the imprisoned brain—of Frank Keller, the diplomat.

Now Bentley was cognizant of something else. With Barter's concentrated work on Keller, something of the power went out of him. Ever so slightly Bentley could feel that Barter was lacking in strength. Some of his will, some of the essential essence of his brain, of his soul, had been expended in the operation—and by so much was Bentley enabled to move. For now he could move two full fingers on each hand. But how carefully he kept watch to see that neither Naka Machi nor Barter noticed that he was bursting from his invisible prison.

If he could get that incineration tube. He'd do the necessary things first . . . then direct the ray of it against the softer portions of the hideout of Barter. The flame would eat through. Somewhere it would finally reach wood; that was inflammable.

There would be smoke, and fire . . . and in the end people would come. Tyler would be watching for a sign, anyway. Barter had said that the police knew approximately where he, Barter, was located.

"NOW, Bentley," said Barter, "I'll explain what I intend doing while I rest a moment before the next ordeal. The whole world is against me now because it regards my experiments as horrible, but if I prove to the world that I am right, and that the men of my creation are supermen, in the end the world will be on my side. I can force it to obey me, in time, but I prefer the world to serve me willingly, because it realizes that what I do for civilization should really be done."

Bentley said nothing because he could not speak.

"I'll send Keller to his office under my instructions," said Barter. "Of course I'll issue a manifesto, first, so that the city will know that it is not a wild ape that has escaped. When the new Keller, with the strong brain of Keller and the mighty body of an ape, appears at his office and proves to his people that he has been vastly improved by my experiment. . . ."

Bentley tried to shut his mind to the horrible picture Barter's words drew before his eyes. Barter broke off short, while Bentley's mind seemed to rock with the shock of Barter's last statement. He saw a picture . . . a great office filled with many desks occupied by white-faced men and women . . . an ornate desk where a "manape" sat. . . . It was ghastly beyond comprehension. It must never come to pass.

Barter spoke again to Naka Machi.

"Bring me David Fator and ape S-19."

"Yes, my master," replied Naka Machi.

AGAIN Bentley went through the horror from beginning to end. He could now move his toes. If only he could fall forward, grasp that incineration tube, turn it on Barter! With Barter unable to control him he would regain his senses in time, he hoped, to stave off the certain charge of Naka Machi, whose hatred for himself he now understood too well.

He hoped, if he were able to accomplish what he planned, that horror upon awakening would cause Ellen to faint. While she was out he could destroy the horror with the cleansing flame . . . and tell her she hadn't seen it, after all.

Bentley could feel the strength pour back into him. Barter was becoming moment by moment more intent on his labors. He was becoming careless with Bentley, not because he underestimated him but because he was intensely absorbed in his work.

By the time two more men had gone bodily into the incinerator and mentally into a pair of apes, the first ape, carelessly dumped on the floor, came out from under the effects of the drug.

"Stand over there in the corner, Keller," Barter said to the hybrid carelessly, "and remember that no matter how you may wish to escape you can only do so if I will. Remain quiet there and consider whether you will oppose me or obey me. Oppose me and your only escape is self-destruction. Obey me and possess the world!"

Bentley could imagine the horror and despair of "Keller," for he himself had known that horror and despair.

Now he could swing his wrists slightly. Naka Machi turned once with a sudden movement and almost caught him at it, and perspiration broke out on Bentley's face again. Thank God, Ellen realized none of what she was experiencing.

TWO other men gave their lives at Barter's hands . . . yet Bentley had only regained sufficient possession of himself to fall forward on his face if he tried to walk, but even that was something.

Five men were gone now. Could he possibly regain muscular control in time to save the lives of some of the eighteen? As he watched the five go into the furnace, one by one, he began to despair of saving any of the eighteen, but with each operation Barter lost mental strength. If he lost in arithmetical progression as he had during the last five, Bentley estimated that he, Bentley, would be able to move his arms enough to grasp the incineration tube by the time Barter had finished his eighth transplantation.

So, the horror growing until nausea ate at Bentley's stomach like voracious maggots, he watched Barter destroy three more men and create godless monsters in their places. As each manape regained consciousness Barter told him what he had told Keller—and Naka Machi took them out, one by one, and placed them in their allotted cages.

Naka Machi placed the eighth man in the furnace, returned the incineration tube to the table.

"Now, oh God the Father!" moaned Bentley.

He leaned forward, striving with all his will to force his hands to go truly to their target as he fell. He had little or no control of his legs or knees. But let him once hold that tube in his hands. . . .

He fell soundlessly, his hands clutching for the tube. His fingers touched it as he crashed to the floor, and it fell near him. His fingers fumbled for the tube and now gripped it tightly.

From under the table, writhing and twisting, striving to break his mental bondage, Bentley saw the legs of Caleb Barter. He snapped the button on the tube and turned its open end toward those legs.

"I must not look into his eyes as he falls," thought Bentley, "or all is lost."

A TERRIBLE scream rang through the operating room. Barter was falling, crumpling as he fell, and as his body slid downward past the table edge, Bentley held the end of the tube toward it. As the bodies of the eight had shriveled, so shriveled the body of Caleb Barter.

Ellen Estabrook screamed horribly, and sprawled on the floor within a foot or two of Bentley. Nature had mercifully sent her into momentary oblivion when the will of Barter, holding her in thrall, had snapped to show her the horror of what she did.

Naka Machi was screaming. Bentley was Bentley again, crawling forth from under the table. Naka Machi met him in a rush and dissolved before the deadly ray as though he had never existed. Its effect must have been a silent explosion, for a fine gray ash came down from the ceiling as the residue which falls when a soaring rocket has exploded and expended its power. The gray ash was Naka Machi, forever rendered harmless to Ellen.

Bentley walked over and stood looking at the manapes in their cages. What could be done with them? There was no hope, no possible way by which they could resume their normal lives, for of their human bodies there remained but heaps of fine powdery ashes.

Suddenly the manape Keller swept his great hairy arm out between the bars and snatched the tube from Bentley's hand. With a cry of mortal anguish Bentley recoiled from the cage. God! Now all was lost if the manape clicked on the deadly ray and swept it over the room.

Before he could formulate a plan of action, the manape pressed the fatal button. With a cry Bentley threw himself across the room to where Ellen lay unconscious, his only thought to somehow protect her from the tube.

BUT the manape, Keller, swung the ray upon the other apes with the human minds, and they dissolved into ashy nothingness with bewildering rapidity. The keen mind of Keller was doing what he knew must be done for the good of everyone concerned.

Numbed with horror, Bentley saw the ray directed on Morton and Stanley. They fell silently and without protest. . . .

Keller clicked off the button and looked over at Bentley. He alone remained of Barter's frightful experiment. He alone remained and it seemed that he was trying to tell Bentley something . . . asking him to now take the tube and turn it full on the body which housed his human brain.

While Bentley hesitated, the manape bent down and placed the tube on the floor of the cage, the muzzle pointing inward. With a clumsy motion of a long hairy arm he reached out and snicked on the button, then placed himself within its deadly range. Keller vanished and the ray bit into the wall back of the cage; began to eat through.

Bentley leaped to his feet and tore across the floor. He plunged his trembling hand through the bars of the cage, switched off the button and lifted the tube.

There were the remaining normal apes. They could have been saved for transportation to the zoo, but horror was on Bentley and he used the tube again, and yet again. . . .

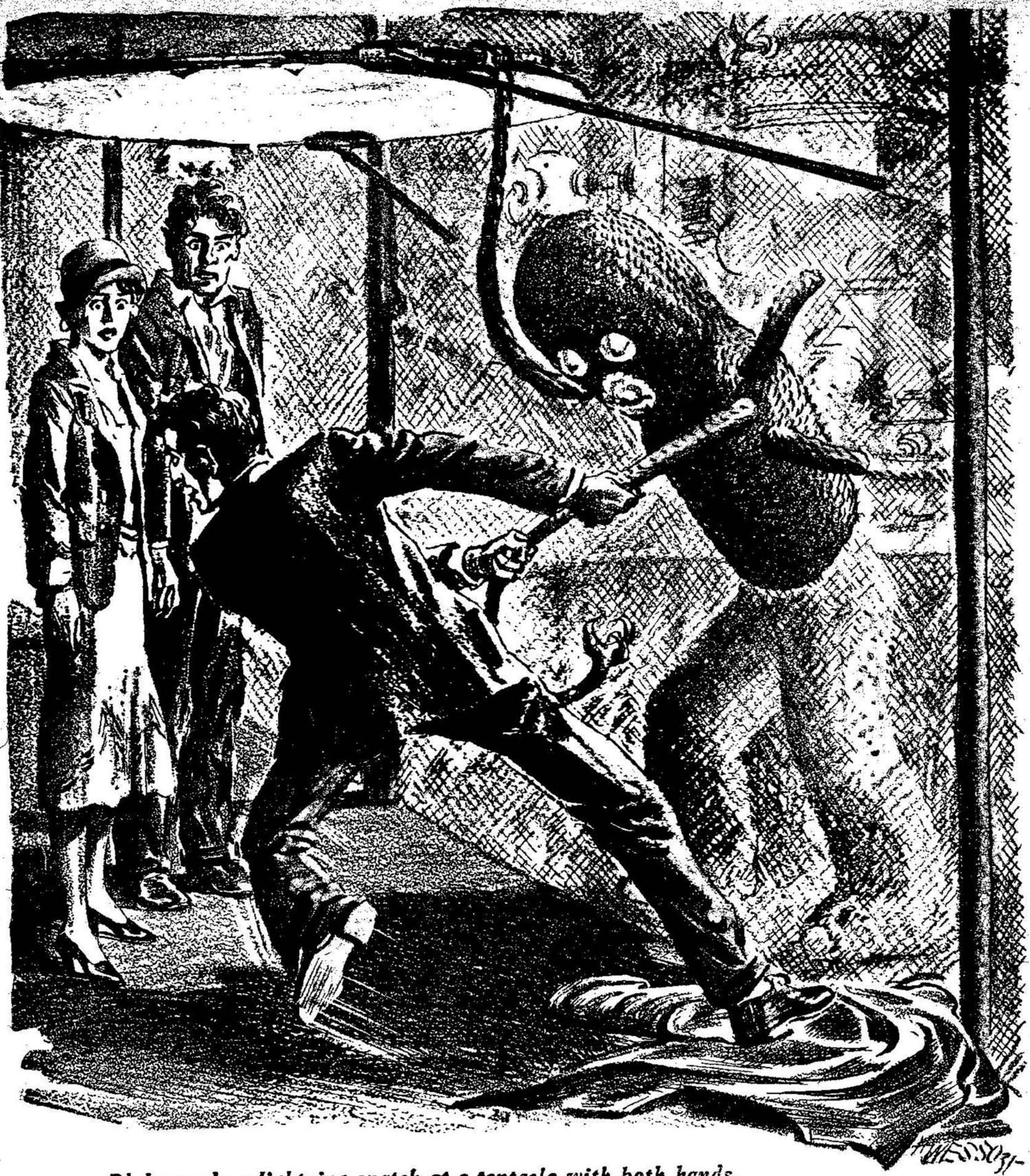
And there were the keys. He pulled them from their slots in the porcelain slab, in case there should be other "Stanley-Morton-Cleves" abroad of whom he knew nothing. . . .

He turned the tube against the red lights and the green lights.

Then he turned the tube upward and held it steadily. He watched the charred hole grow bigger and deeper in the high ceiling. . . .

When at last he heard the approaching clang of the fire engine bells and the screaming triumph of police sirens, he carefully snicked off the button of the tube and returned to lift the form of Ellen in arms that were strong to hold her.

(The end.)



Blake made a lightning snatch at a tentacle with both hands.

Zehru of Xollar

By Hal K. Wells

Three Earthlings are whisked on an interdimensional journey to the den of the Scientist Zehru.

WHEN the rolling thunder of infra-bass first came to their ears, Robert Blake and Helen Lawton were standing on the platform of a New York subway station waiting for the arrival of an uptown express to bear them to their homes.

They made a strikingly attractive couple as they stood there. New York had not had time as yet to remove the bronze tan of an outdoor life from Blake's ruggedly good-looking face. His tall athletic figure was still conspicuous for the lithe strength that had made him an All-Western tackle less than two years ago.

Standing beside Blake's husky figure, Helen Lawton looked like a tiny, very perfect, blonde doll, with an exquisitely molded face framed in curly bobbed hair that was the clear golden-amber hue of orange honey. There was a diamond sparkling on the ring finger of the girl's slim left hand, placed there by Blake.

It was well after midnight, and the only other passenger waiting on the station was a burly chap leaning against one of the white pillars on the other side of the platform. After a casual glance at the fellow, with his derby hat shoved far back from a low forehead, his blatantly conspicuous clothing, and the suspicious bulge under one arm-pit, Blake had mentally set him down as a minor gangster, probably a strong-arm man for some beer mob.

Blake and Helen had been standing there but a few minutes when the strange sound first became audible. For a moment Blake thought it was merely the rumbling roar of an express approaching far down the tunnel. Then he realized that no subway train could possibly produce a sound effect so oddly disturbing and strangely alien.

It was like no sound that Blake had ever heard before. Vibrant with colossal power, it suggested a sustained note struck from a giant organ, a note so low in pitch that it seemed a full octave below the lowest bass note ever struck. Whatever it was, the thundering vibration of infra-bass was coming nearer with startling swiftness.

IT was impossible to locate the source of the mighty pulsing note. It seemed to be coming simultaneously from all directions, like a great hollow sphere of invisible sound waves closing in with the station platform as its central focal point.

Helen's face was white with dread as she shrank closer into Blake's embrace. Blake noted that the gangster across the platform was standing tensely at bay with his back against the pillar and his right hand thrust under his coat as he stared wildly about him in an effort to discover the cause of the disturbance.

The rolling thunder closed in upon them with a final rush that brought it so near that their very bodies seemed to vibrate in harmony with that mighty note of shuddering bass. Then with startling abruptness the green net came.

Out from the walls and down from the roof spurted scores of quivering ribbons of blinding green flame. Swiftly the radiant tendrils rushed in upon the shrinking three from every side, while the infra-bass thundered in mighty crescendo.

Blake instinctively swept Helen close within the shelter of his arms in an effort to protect her with his own body against the searing menace of those onrushing green flames. The next moment the fiery ribbons were upon them, lashing about their bodies, crossing and crisscrossing in the air above and around them in a great tangled web of interlacing lines of flame that filled the entire platform.

WITH a shock of relief Blake found that there was no heat in those strange flames, but his relief was short-lived as the next second brought him realization of the real menace of the radiant ribbons. There was a solidity and strength in those glowing streamers that held them as helplessly captive as though they were gripped in ribbons of steel. Dazed and helpless, the three struggled for a moment in the meshes of the weird net of flame like fish caught in the strands of some giant cosmic seine.

The trembling thunder of infrabass abruptly changed to a thin whining note so high in pitch that it seemed the nearly soundless ghost of a metallic scream. With the change in sound Blake became aware of a new and astounding change in his surroundings.

The walls and roof of the station seemed closing in upon him as though he were growing in size at an incredible rate. The next moment he shot through the roof, hurtling on and upward with the velocity of a rocket. The sensation was one that his reeling brain could not even grasp. His body seemed to be inside every stone, iron bar, and lump of Earth, yet at the same time every exterior object seemed *within* his body. It was an eery chaos of a dozen different dimensions blending to form a Space in which there was no known dimension.

As they flashed on out to the surface Blake had one hazy glimpse of Manhattan's glowing lights spread all about them. Then the speed of their progress leaped into a new and terrible acceleration that blotted out every tangible sensation from Blake's brain.

Time and Space alike seemed to vanish as their hurtling flight sent them rocketing on for distances inconceivably vast through a bleak and appalling Nothingness, where neither sight nor sound existed.

Then abruptly the speed of their flight seemed to be lessening. Sensation returned to Blake. He again heard the thin high-pitched metallic wail, now swiftly deepening to the familiar growl of rolling bass. He again noted the presence of the glowing green ribbons of the net that still encircled them.

A BLINDINGLY brilliant purple mist was now closing in upon them from every direction, bringing with it a nameless and agonizing force that seemed to be shaking the very atoms in Blake's body asunder. Then they dropped swiftly down out of the purple mists, and the strange agony at once vanished. Blake felt their downward progress come to an end with the gentle arrival of his feet upon firm ground.

The encircling net of green flame glowed dazzlingly brighter for a brief moment, then swiftly vanished into thin air, while the mutter of bass vibrations simultaneously died away into silence. Blake staggered and nearly fell as the sudden release from the net's strands again left his body free.

He looked down at Helen as she stood huddled close beside him, still in the shelter of his arms. The girl's face was white with terror as she looked back up at him.

"Bob, what happened—and where on Earth are we?" Her voice trembled a little in spite of her plucky effort to keep it steady.

Blake's bewildered gaze was already roving around them trying to comprehend the incredible details of their surroundings. "I've no idea what happened, dear," he answered slowly. "As to where we are now, I'm very much afraid it's nowhere on Earth!"

"Then where is this hopped-up layout anyway, fellah, if it ain't on Earth?" broke in a voice with a decided East Side twang. Blake quickly turned and saw that the gangster had remained with them in that eery flight in the green net. There was an expression of dumfounded amazement upon the man's heavy face, and he was obviously anxious to be friendly with the two who now represented the only link with the familiar world he had known.

"Gee, for a minute I thought they had me on the spot in some new way, sure!" he chattered excitedly as he came quickly over to join Helen and Blake. "There's plenty of guys wantin' to turn the heat on me there in the Big Town. I'm Gil Mapes, see? But this ain't no frame-up like any I ever heard of. What happened anyway, fellah?"

FOR the moment Blake did not answer. The three of them were silent as they stared about them with eyes that were dazed by the startlingly unfamiliar aspect of every detail in their surroundings.

From the twin purple suns that blazed down through the tenuous mists overhead to the barren blue-gray ground underfoot, there was not a single object familiar to Earthly eyes. The huge enclosure in which the three of them stood was obviously the work of intelligent beings of some kind, but its mechanical details were products of a science different from any known to Blake.

The purpose of the enclosure seemed to be to maintain an area of clear air in the midst of the swirling purple vapors that pressed in against it from the top and from every side. In shape it was a great oblong cell, some fifty feet high, two hundred yards long, and about one hundred yards wide. The three captives stood near the center.

Fencing in the enclosure at twenty-yard intervals and reaching upward to the ceiling were slender posts of some lusterless black metal. Between these posts streamed unbroken, nearly transparent sheets of some unknown force, the only visible sign of which was the presence of countless millions of tiny shimmering golden flecks which danced like dust motes in a ray of sunlight. It was obviously this thin sheet of unknown force that was keeping the purple mists at bay, for fan-like antennae at the top of each post spread a similar shimmering sheet that formed a ceiling for the clear-aired area.

THE three Earthlings were facing one of the sidewalls of the big enclosures. The purple mists outside made it hard to see clearly for any distance, but Blake had an impression that the surrounding terrain was featured by the same barren, nearly desert bleakness that characterized the interior of the enclosure, where scattered clumps of dead, spiky black branches of shrublike vegetation were the only sign of plant life.

Just within the distant end wall at their right there was a low platform surmounted by a wide arch some ten feet in height, both constructed of silver-colored metal. There was nothing between them and the endwall to their left, but they could see that the ground sloped sharply upward from the barrier-sheet, and on the crest of the ridge a gigantic cone-shaped structure of solid black could be seen dimly through the intervening mists.

The cone-building seemed to be the source of the power that kept the enclosure intact. Slender cables of black metal ran down the slope from it into the clear-aired space, spreading out over the dusty gray-blue ground to the base of each of the tall posts, with a heavier copper-colored cable running on the silver arch. From within the windowless interior of the cone there was audible a low hum as of tremendous power being generated there.

"Gee, what a rummy joint this place is!" There was frank awe in the gangster's voice as he at last broke the silence. "That guy with the green net sure took us for one sweet ride. Mebbe we're on the Moon now, or on Mars, huh?"

Blake shook his head. "No, we're completely out of our entire solar system. Those twin purple suns up there prove that. We may even be in another universe, or another dimension from our own. A piece of apparatus that could whisk us up through fifty feet of earth and masonry as that green net did obviously works in dimensions of which we've never dreamed. The only thing we're sure of is that we were brought to this purple world deliberately and intentionally by an intelligent being of some kind, scooped up like tadpoles from a mud-puddle and dumped here in this elaborate enclosure It had already prepared for us."

BLAKE nodded to where the black cone-building loomed through the purple mists outside the end-wall. "Whoever or whatever the thing was that brought us here, I have a hunch It's there in that power-house watching us. I'd suggest that we walk down toward that end of the enclosure for a closer look. We may at least find out whether we're guests or prisoners."

"Listens good to me, fellah," agreed Mapes, sliding a hand up to his shoulder holster and bringing out a squat black automatic pistol of heavy caliber. "We'll do a prowl over that way, and if His Nibs tries any more funny business mebbe a few slugs outta this rod will change his mind for him."

"Better go easy with the gun, Mapes," advised Blake as the three of them started slowly toward the cone-building. "From what we've already seen, there must be weapons in this world that would make your pistol look like a kid's pop-gun. We'd better go easy till—wait, what's that?"

The thin high-pitched whine, followed promptly by the familiar growling thunder of infra-bass, had again become audible. At the same moment a long pencil-like beam of green light glowed into visibility, extending from the tip of the cone to a point high within the enclosure just back of them. As they halted abruptly and watched, they saw the interlacing meshes of the green flame-net materialize suddenly at the end of the beam.

The beam curved into an arc that dropped the net swiftly to the ground some thirty yards from them. Its meshes were packed nearly full of dark, writhing figures.

"Looks like some more tadpoles arriving for our pond!" Mapes exclaimed. "I wonder what part of N' Yawk His Nibs yanked these babies from?"

BLAKE'S answer died on his lips as the net and beam glowed blindingly brighter for a brief second, then disappeared, leaving the dark figures in full view. Helen choked back a gasp of horror. Mapes swore in consternation and hurriedly swung his pistol into line with those writhing shapes.

The net's latest captives were not from New York, nor were they from any other part of the planet Earth. Hideous spawn of some unknown world out in the black void of Space, they writhed for a moment in a nightmare chaos of countless brown-furred bodies, then swiftly disentangled themselves before the staring eyes of the three Earthlings.

The things were apparently too low in the mental scale to have any reaction to their situation other than a blind instinct to attack any other living being within reach, for they promptly headed for the three captives from Earth.

As the creatures came shambling rapidly forward on powerful bowed legs, and with the tips of their long hairy arms brushing the ground, they looked like grotesquely distorted apes. The crowning horror of those shambling figures, however, lay in the fact that they were completely headless!

Even when the things approached to a distance of less than ten feet before halting in momentary indecision, Blake could detect no sign of any normal skull in the blunt space at the top of the powerful hairy torso. There was a furry-lipped mouth opening of some kind in the hollow between the bulging shoulders, but of eyes, ears, nose, or brain cavity there was no discernible trace.

For a long moment the headless ape-things and the three human beings stood silently facing each other. Mapes' pistol was leveled pointblank at the nearest of the creatures, but their overwhelming numbers made the gangster hold his fire.

There were two distinct groups of the things. At least twenty members of each group were in the crowd facing the Earthlings. To the rear of these attackers two oddly repulsive objects were carried and carefully shielded by picked guards of four unusually large and powerful ape-things.

THE nature of those two guarded objects puzzled Blake. They looked like large eggs of dirty-gray jelly, about a yard in length. They were obviously alive, for their gelatinous masses quivered and trembled in constant activity. Blake noted that there seemed to be a curious connection between the ebb and flow of pulsations in the egg-masses and the movements of the ape-things.

His attention was abruptly recalled to the headless things in front of him as they suddenly began shambling forward again. There was no possible mistaking the intention of those advancing horrors. They were moving to the attack.

They reached barely to Blake's shoulders, but he realized that their enormous numbers and hook-taloned hands would make the result of the battle almost a foregone conclusion. The fact that the headless things were without eyes was no handicap to them. The swift certainty of their movements proved that they had a sense of sight of some kind that was in every way as efficient as eyesight.

Blake looked hurriedly around him, seeking a place where they might be at the best possible advantage in the impending battle. There was a small dense thicket of the spiky dead branches half a dozen yards to their right. At Blake's low command, the three made a dash for the thicket. Arriving there, they ranged themselves against it, with their backs at least partially protected from attack.

THE maneuver seemed to puzzle the ape-things for a moment. They stood passively watching the retreat of the three until they had reached the thicket. Then the creatures again began slowly closing in upon them. Blake snatched up a dead branch from the ground near the thicket, and was delighted to find that its weight and tough fiber made it an excellent club.

He stripped off his topcoat and passed it back to Helen. Its tough fabric, heavily rubberized for proof against rain, might guard her head and face at least momentarily from those ripping talons if the headless attackers came to close quarters. With Helen safely behind them, Blake and Mapes turned grimly to face the enemy.

The attack was prompt in coming. Moving with the perfect synchronization of a single unit, one of the main groups came shambling in, followed an instant later by the other group. Mapes' pistol sent a bullet crashing squarely into the nearest attacker. The creature staggered momentarily, then came lurching on again, apparently not even crippled. Blake swung his heavy club in a whistling arc that sent two of his adversaries broken and writhing to the ground.

He heard Mapes' pistol bark four times more as the things closed in. Then the gun was knocked from the gangster's grip by a groping talon-armed hand. Mapes tried to batter back his assailants with his naked fists, but the flailing arms of the horde knocked him from his feet. His limp body was promptly tramped into unconsciousness by the milling feet of the close-packed group.

Blake lashed the heavy club about him with a burst of savage fury that for the moment sent the furred horrors reeling backward. Their retreat ended after a scant two yards. Reforming their ranks, they again began cautiously shambling forward in a new attack that Blake realized would probably mean the end.

IT was easy enough to batter the things to ground, but it seemed impossible to seriously hurt them. Their incredible vitality and their overwhelming numbers made them almost invincible. Grimly Blake set himself to battle as long as he could in that last desperate effort to keep the hordes at bay.

He noticed idly that the two groups still kept their oddly separated formation. Behind them the two egg-masses of jelly were now seething in new activity after a brief lessening of their gruesome shivering. Blake now saw that there was a direct and unmistakable connection between the activity of the jelly and the corresponding activity of the ape-things.

Realization of the fact sent a sudden flash of inspiration flaming through Blake's weary brain, correlating the real significance of a dozen different things he had been subconsciously noting ever since the first appearance of the weird beasts.

Those attacking things were not hordes of individual animals. They were merely two complete organisms, with the members of each organism controlled by its nucleus through invisible lines of nervous force as the various individual cells of the human body are linked by nerve fibers. No wonder the creatures themselves were blind. The egg-mass that was the nucleus of each of the two groups was eyes, brain, and seat of life for every apething in the group.

With a swift surge of hope Blake realized the way to conquer the things. If he could only shatter those flaccid masses of jelly, he would destroy the swarming dozens of beasts at the same time.

Reaching the jelly ovoids seemed at first consideration to be an impossible task. They were carefully guarded far in the rear of the attacking groups. Blake knew that he had scarcely a chance in a hundred of battering his way through the intervening ape-things.

THEN he remembered the gangster's pistol. His searching eyes found it immediately, there on the ground nearly under the feet of the ape-things as they again shambled forward to the attack.

Blake staked everything upon a last desperate sortie against the advancing things. With his club whistling around his head in crashing blows that wrought murderous havoc in the close-packed hordes, he drove them back for one breathless moment that gave him time to leap forward and snatch up the pistol.

The ape-things were already springing back upon him as he swung the pistol into line with one of the jelly-masses. He barely pressed the trigger before the charging brutes knocked him from his feet.

As he went down he flung his arms over his head to protect his face from the expected attack of those hooked talons, but none came. A body thudded down upon him, then slid limply off again without making any move to attack. Blake scrambled to his feet.

Writhing upon the ground all around him were ape-things in their death agonies. On the ground beyond them, quivering and broken in the midst of its dying guards, was a viscid mass of loathsome gray jelly. Blake's shot had apparently struck home squarely in the center of that vulnerable blob. Even as he watched, the gelatinous mass shuddered in a last convulsion, then became quite still. At the same instant the last sign of life vanished from the writhing ape-things on the ground.

A good half of the attacking creatures were included in the dead bodies. The other half, Blake now saw, had retreated to cluster in wild panic about the remaining blob of jelly. Realizing exultantly that his single shot had slain one of the two weirdly disassociated organisms, Blake with pistol in hand advanced toward the other, trying to get a clear shot at the jelly through the furry bodies clustering around it.

THE group promptly turned and fled in blind panic. Blake sent the pistol's last shot crashing into the mass without any appreciable effect. Then the things' stampede carried them hurtling on through one of the gold-flecked side walls out into the swirling purple mists.

The gold-flecked sheet flowed together again so swiftly behind the things that a fraction of a second later there was not even the slightest indication in its shimmering unbroken surface to show that it had ever been pierced.

For thirty yards the fleeing ape-things sped on into the purple vapors. Then disaster struck them with bewildering swiftness. They stopped in full flight, shuddered for a moment, then slumped to the ground with their limbs writhing in agony. In their center the jelly ovoid quivered madly in the same strange torture.

Tiny patches of vivid purple appeared at a hundred different points upon the dying creatures. The patches spread and merged with lightning rapidity until a solid sheet of livid purple covered the writhing mass. Swiftly that mass lost both movement and shape as it melted down into a pool of turgid purple slime. Then the slime vaporized into purple mists that blended into the surrounding vapors, and all trace of the ape-things and their jelly nucleus had vanished.

Stunned by the incredible speed of this general dissolution, Blake realized for the first time the real reason for the presence of the gold-flecked walls of force. Without those shimmering walls the captives would not have lived for a minute in the deadly purple atmosphere of this weird world beneath the twin suns. The gold-flecked walls were both their protection and their prison. The swirling purple mists outside those walls held the Earthlings as effectively and hopelessly prisoners in their enclosure as gold-fish in a bowl of water.

BLAKE turned back to the thicket to see how Helen and Mapes had fared in that terrific battle with the headless things. He was relieved to see that the girl had apparently escaped without even a scratch. She was kneeling beside Mapes' prone figure, doing what she could to revive him. The gangster was badly battered, but he seemed to have no serious injuries. He was already beginning to stir weakly and show signs of returning life.

Blake started to step over to the two. Then he stopped abruptly as he heard a sharp metallic clang from the cone-building out in the purple mists beyond the end wall. He looked quickly up and saw that an oval window had opened in the structure near its tip. Framed in the opening was what seemed to be a large concave mirror. At one side of the mirror was a living being of some kind, but the intervening mists prevented Blake from making out any details beyond a hazy glimpse of a cluster of what seemed to be long slender snake-like black tentacles.

The next moment there spurted from the mirror a broad and swiftly spreading beam of red light so brilliant that it glowed clearly even in the bright purple rays of the twin suns. Before Blake could shout a warning to Helen the racing flood of ruddy radiance was upon them. The scene reeled in a blurred kaleidoscope of flaming colors before Blake's eyes for a brief second, then complete oblivion swept over him.

AFTER an interval that seemed hours, consciousness returned to him as suddenly as it had left him. His first bewildered look around him disclosed the fact that startling changes had occurred in his surroundings during the period while he was under the anesthesia of the red ray.

His first effort at movement brought realization that he was in the grip of a strange paralysis. His head and neck seemed quite normal in every way, but from the throat downward his body was completely dead as far as any power of voluntary movement was concerned.

He twisted his head stiffly to one side, and saw that Helen was standing there beside him. Just beyond her was the motionless figure of Gil Mapes. Both the gangster and the girl were in the grip of the same strange paralysis. Like Blake, they were standing there rigidly motionless, facing the gold-flecked barrier wall just in front of them.

A moment's painful scrutiny of their position showed Blake that the posts forming the wall of the enclosure at the end toward the cone had been brought in nearly a hundred yards toward them while they slept. The shimmering barrier sheet was now scarcely a yard from their faces, yet they still stood near the thicket where they had battled the headless horrors. Blake saw his coat half-buried in the blue-gray dust near his feet where Helen had discarded the garment to minister to Mapes.

Their unseen captor had obviously made definite preparations for whatever his next purpose with them was to be, for a long wheeled platform had been brought to a position opposite them just outside the shimmering gold-flecked sheet. Blake noted the shattered remains of Mapes' pistol on the ground at one side of the platform. It had apparently been fished from the enclosure and rendered harmless after their captor had seen the weapon's efficient use against the headless apethings.

Clustered upon the wheeled platform was an assemblage of intricately winding coils, glowing tubes, and other apparatus that conveyed no more meaning to Blake's bewildered gaze than a sight of the interior of a metropolitan power-house would to a Congo savage.

THERE was only one piece of the apparatus regarding whose probable function Blake could even guess. This was a pair of long slender arms that projected through the shimmering walls into the enclosure, supporting at their end a large thin metal plate located just over the heads of the three Earthlings. Blake was willing to wager that it was this overhead plate that was responsible for the odd paralysis that held them helpless.

Then a figure came slowly into view from where it had been concealed by the apparatus, and Blake forgot all thought of the strange mechanisms as he watched the monstrous thing clamber stiffly from the platform and halt squarely in front of the captives to stare at them through the transparency of the intervening force sheet.

The thing was a curious blending of human and bestial features. It stood barely five feet in height, yet its great scale-armored skull was at least three times as large as that of a grown man. There was colossal mental power and nameless evil glowing in the dark depths of the two abnormally large eyes that stared fixedly out from under the heavy forehead. The thing had no nose. The mouth opening, surrounded by a rosette of flabby gray skin, was a mere slit. The entire skull and face were covered with small, closely overlapping scales of lusterless gray.

The head merged directly into a short black torso nearly as wide as the skull itself. From this trunk there writhed a score of long black snake-like tentacles, each terminating in a flexible three-fingered "hand." The trunk was supported by two short thick legs, armored with gray scales, and ending in broad three-toed feet.

"Greetings, Earthlings!" The voice that emanated from the grotesque mouth was surprisingly resonant in tone. "Allow me to present myself. I am Zehru, imperial scientist of Xollar."

THE monstrosity seemed amused at the expressions of blank surprise upon the faces of his captives. "I learned your crude language from your brain cells while you slept under the red ray," he explained. "Also I learned many other things regarding your planet, Earth. I am glad to find your world so well adapted to my purpose. Within a few years after my arrival there I shall be its unquestioned ruler."

Blake started to voice the many questions that were surging through his mind, but an imperious gesture of an outflung tentacle stopped him.

"Silence, Earthling!" There was tolerant contempt in Zehru's ringing voice. "I will explain some of the things that puzzle you. There is no reason why I should trouble myself to do so, yet it may while away the tedium of the short wait yet remaining before my apparatus becomes charged to the required point. Listen carefully, Earthling, for at best you will find many of my thoughts beyond the feeble limits of the word forms with which you have provided me.

"The world of Xollar, where you now are, is a planet in the island universe known to your astronomers as the Great Nebula of Andromeda. Until a short time ago I was one of its ruling scientists. Then I sinned, and so grave was my sin according to the laws of this planet that the Council of Three decreed my death. That death sentence upon Xollar is irrevocable, and no man has yet escaped it no matter where upon the planet he may be when the appointed time for his execution comes. I was given the usual period of grace in which to put my affairs in order. Instead, I have labored unceasingly here in my laboratory, and my labors have borne fruit. I am the first man in Xollarian history to find a means of escaping the dread death penalty.

"Briefly, I discovered a way by which I can flee to your far-distant universe, where not even the powers of the Council of Three can follow me. That way lies through the door of inter-dimensional Space. In Space as you know it, the almost unthinkable distance of a million light years separates Xollar from the dwarf star you call your Sun. Yet, traveling *between* Space, the two planets nearly touch each other. The same situation of being near neighbors in inter-dimensional Space holds true with Xollar and at least seven other planets located in widely separated parts of your universe.

"LET me try to illustrate what I mean by traveling between Space. We will assume a nearly two-dimensional universe in the form of a circular piece of paper three feet in diameter. There is a dot in the exact center of each side of this paper. To a two-dimensional creature, forced to travel only on the surface of the paper, the distance between the two dots can never be less than thirty-six inches. Yet by cutting *between* the two surfaces and going directly through the paper the dots are less than one-hundredth of an inch apart.

"Such is the case with Xollar and the planets in your universe which are our immediate neighbors in inter-dimensional Space. In order to reach those planets I had only to develop a method of using sufficient force to cut *between* the three dimensions of intervening Space. In solving this problem I developed both an inter-dimensional net to bring beings from your universe to mine, and an inter-dimensional gate to permit beings to pass from here back to worlds in your galaxy.

"You have already seen the workings of the net. It was the device of green fire that brought you here. The use of the net was a vital part of my plans, for without the use of a physical body from some world in your universe I could not hope to live longer than a few minutes after leaving Xollar via the inter-dimensional gate. The inherent characteristics and basic elements of your galaxy and the Andromedan universe are so different in every way that an inhabitant of either star-group cannot exist in the other. Xollar's purple atmosphere is characteristic of Andromedan worlds. Your oxygen-saturated air is typical of worlds in your galaxy. Just as Xollar's purple mists would be immediately fatal to you, so would your clear oxygen-tainted air be quickly fatal to me.

"ACCORDINGLY, my only chance of surviving in one of your worlds is to first transfer my Intelligence to the body of one of the dwellers upon that planet. Of the seven planets within reach of my net I found only two that promised to be at all suitable. One was your Earth, the other a minor planet circling the star you call Vega. I brought both you and a net-load of Vegans here to this oxygen-filled enclosure I had already prepared.

"The Vegans were the headless things with the jelly nuclei. I watched your battle with them, and waited to choose as my vehicle the planetary type that proved the stronger. You vanquished the Vegans, so it is in the body of an Earthling that I shall leave Xollar, and it is to the planet Earth that I shall be hurtled through the inter-dimensional gate.

"Aside from the slight difficulty caused by having to keep my body and yours each in its proper element during the operation, the matter of transfer into one of your bodies is a simple one. It involves none of the clumsy brain surgery of your Earthly science. We of Xollar have found that the real Intelligence of a being is an invisible force not at all dependent for existence upon the protoplasm through which it manifests. My Intelligence can function quite as well in your brain cells as in my own.

"I require no assistant in the transfer." Zehru indicated an intricate piece of apparatus on the platform behind him. It was a massive cylinder of fluorescent metal, with two long metallic cables running from its center, each cable ending in a saucer-shaped disk.

"I HAVE only to thrust one cable through the force-wall into your enclosure and place its disk upon one of your heads, then place the other disk upon my own head. The apparatus is entirely automatic. Three seconds after both disks are in place my Intelligence will course into the Earthling brain, driving out his Intelligence and destroying it as mine enters.

"I will, of course, remove the selected body from under the paralyzing plate before I attach the disks. Then when I am safely transferred to the Earthling body I will have only to walk on through the enclosure to the silver arch at the far end and leave Xollar forever.

"That silver arch is the inter-dimensional gate to your Earth. Its operation is slightly different from that of the net. Where the net was capable of reaching under the surface of your planet, a proceeding I tried when two attempts upon the surface proved fruitless, the gate is so adjusted that it will place its passenger exactly upon the surface of your world. It requires no cooperation from this end. When I step under the arch I merely close a black lever there. Inter-dimensional force immediately catapults me to your Earth. Then the automatic mechanism of the gate will within half a minute of my departure release an explosion that will shatter everything within a radius of a mile here, and so prevent the Council of Three from even guessing the method of my escape."

"But what of the two of us whose bodies you do not need?" Blake protested. "Can you not at least take them through the arch-gate with you back to their home world?"

"Why should I do anything so foolish as that?" Zehru answered callously. "They might easily be a menace to my first attempts to establish myself upon your planet. Far better to leave them here in their present state of paralysis to be safely destroyed in the explosion of the gate."

ZEHRU now thrust three of his tentacles into a vat of milky fluid, and withdrew them coated with a silver sheen on the black flesh. The silver glaze seemed to be an insulation against both the oxygen of the enclosure and the paralyzing force of the overhead disk, for the Xollarian promptly thrust the three silver-coated arms through the wall and began handling the bodies of Mapes and Blake in a painstaking process of examination.

Again Blake noted that the shimmering gold-flecked wall closed quickly in and kept its surface unbroken no matter how often objects were thrust through it.

Completely ignoring Helen, Zehru lifted first Mapes, then Blake, his tentacles probing, fingering, exploring. There was enormous power in the Xollarian's grotesque body. He lifted the men as though they were wooden dolls, bringing them close to the shimmering wall to peer at them, then setting them carefully down again on their feet under the disk. Blake wondered idly why their stiff bodies did not topple over when they were left unsupported, then decided that the paralyzing force of the disk probably left the automatic muscular balancing movements unimpaired, affecting only the powers of voluntary movement.

THEN, as Zehru set him down after one of the periods of examination, Blake noticed a new and startling change the moment his feet touched the ground. His right leg and right arm were no longer dead!

He hurriedly glanced down at the ground at his feet, and promptly found what seemed to be the reason for his partial freedom from the paralysis. In setting his body down the last time Zehru had moved Blake slightly. His right foot now rested upon a corner of the discarded topcoat lying half buried there in the blue-gray dust.

The heavily rubberized cloth apparently acted as an insulating sheet that prevented the effective grounding of the paralyzing force that streamed down through Blake's body from the overhead disk. Consequently all portions of his body between the coat and the disk were free from the paralysis. For a moment Blake wondered at Zehru's carelessness. Then he realized that the insulating qualities of rubber would naturally be unknown to a Xollarian.

Noting that Zehru was busy at the moment with his work upon Mapes, Blake quickly grasped at the faint chance the presence of the rubberized cloth offered him. Working with infinite slowness and caution, he edged his right foot over an inch at a time, dragging the rest of his body with it.

Luck was with him. Zehru continued, absorbed in his work upon Mapes. The Xollarian's telepathic powers apparently functioned only with the aid of the red ray, for he remained oblivious of Blake's actions. One final cautious dragging movement, and Blake's entire body was upon the cloth, with every muscle again vibrantly alive.

BLAKE stood there motionless, faking paralysis, while his brain raced in an effort to figure the best use to make of his present advantage. He was still trapped, not daring to reach even a hand beyond the protection of the cloth underfoot. The first essential of any effort at escape would have to be a lunge of sufficient power to take him safely beyond the area of the disk's influence.

Blake's first thought was to hurl himself through the barrier wall upon Zehru, trusting to sheer surprise to overwhelm the Xollarian, but he quickly dismissed that plan. It left too many elements in Zehru's favor. There was a tube-like weapon thrust in a belt around Zehru's middle and there were probably a dozen other different weapons lying hand, to his reach among the apparatus on the platform. The deadly purple mists beyond the wall would alone in all probability overcome Blake before he could batter Zehru down.

By far the best plan was to stage the battle inside the enclosure where Blake would be in his own native element. If he could yank Zehru inside the wall he would have him away from contact with his mechanical weapons and battling in an atmosphere inherently poisonous to him. Under those circumstances, Blake felt that he might have an even chance in a hand-to-hand combat with the powerful but slow-footed Xollarian.

Once Zehru was eliminated, escape back to Earth should be a simple matter. The silver gate, with its automatic mechanism needing only the closing of a lever, was ready and waiting there in the enclosure behind them.

FOR long tense minutes Blake forced himself to remain rigidly motionless while Zehru labored over Mapes. Then finally the Xollarian turned his attention briefly back to Blake, and thrust two tentacles in to grip his body. No sooner had the tentacles crossed above the border of the cloth than Zehru realized that something was wrong. He tried to whip his arms back again, but too late.

Blake made a lightning snatch at a tentacle with both hands, and in the same lithe movement turned from the barrier wall and flung himself headlong toward the center of the enclosure. Zehru had no time to brace himself. He was jerked bodily through the shimmering wall and on after Blake's lunging body.

One of the Xollarian's waving tentacles grasped wildly at the overhead disk in an effort to stay his flight. The only result was to bring the entire disk and its supports crashing in ruins to the ground upon the struggling figures of Blake and himself.

Blake was upon his feet again instantly. Snatching up a yard-long scrap of metal from the wreckage of the disk, he flung himself upon Zehru. The Xollarian seemed for the moment too dazed by his fall to fight back. With tentacles raised to guard his head, he staggered backward in retreat, every step taking him farther away from the wall and the purple mists.

Blake was vaguely aware that Helen and Mapes, freed by the wrecking of the disk, were scrambling to their feet. Mapes was already running toward the combatants. Blake was glad at the prospect of an ally. Zehru's dazed condition was swiftly passing. He had now stopped his retreat and was already fumbling a tentacle toward the tube-weapon in his belt.

Blake flung himself upon Zehru in another effort to beat him down before he could draw that weapon, but his metal club glanced harmlessly off the tentacles Zehru raised to shield his head. Then beyond Zehru Blake saw something that made him stop his assault.

IT was Mapes, sprinting toward the silver arch-gate at the other end of the enclosure. Blake's heart sank as he realized the gangster's treachery. If he once reached that arch he could send himself safely hurtling back to Earth, while Blake and Helen would be left to perish with Zehru in the explosion that would immediately follow. It was too late for Blake to head the gangster off. He had already covered half the distance to the arch.

Zehru noted Mapes' fleeing figure almost as quickly as did Blake. Swiftly the Xollarian swung his tube-weapon into line with the fleeing gangster. A thin pencil of dull yellow light of a peculiar density spurted from the tube toward Mapes. There was a flash of blinding flame as the light beam met the gangster's body; then Mapes' figure seemed to literally explode, as though blasted by dynamite from within. So devastating was the force of that explosion that nothing remained of Mapes' body beyond a few scattered fragments of shoes and clothing.

Blake was still dazed at the cataclysmic suddenness of Mapes' death as Zehru swung the tube around to train it upon him. Only a last-minute desperate effort upon Blake's part saved him. His wildly thrown metal club made a lucky hit on the tube itself, knocking it, shattered and useless, out of Zehru's grasp.

Unarmed, Zehru faced Blake with his face contorting in agony. For a moment the Xollarian swayed there, apparently trying to gather his failing strength for the next move. The deadly air of the enclosure was already taking hideous toll. The scaly flesh of his head and face was dissolving like melting butter.

Zehru's strength was ebbing too swiftly for him to have any chance of gaining safety through either of the distant side walls. His only hope of fighting back to the purple mists was to pass Blake and go through the nearby end wall through which he had originally been drawn.

He came lunging forward in an attack whose sheer fury made Blake give ground before the menace of the lashing tentacles.

BLAKE took another backward step, then staggered as his foot struck a rough spot in the ground. Zehru's tentacles were upon him before he could recover himself. His club was jerked from his fingers and sent hurtling far out of reach. Half a dozen of the tentacle-arms lashed around his throat in a strangling grip.

He clawed wildly at the choking coils, but they failed to loosen even a fraction of an inch. Desperately Blake sent his fists smashing into the gray face. The scale armor of Zehru's skull, fast weakening in the liquefying influence of the oxygen, gave way beneath that battering attack. He staggered, and his coiling tentacles relaxed slightly.

Blake tore himself free. A final smashing blow, with every ounce of his one hundred and ninety pounds behind it, sent Zehru crashing to the ground. The Xollarian tried to rise, then feebly slumped back, his strength spent. Blake leaped forward to finish his opponent, but stopped as he saw that his efforts were not needed.

The deadly air of the enclosure was now overwhelming Zehru with swift and hideous death. He was literally rotting before Blake's horrified eyes, the gray-scaled skin sloughing off in streaming rivulets of pallid ooze, and the entire body contorting in what was obviously a death agony.

Sickened, Blake stepped back a pace or two. Zehru's tentacles feebly beat the ground around him, then suddenly one of the writhing arms blundered upon a thin cable running along the ground. Before Blake could spring forward to stop him, Zehru with a last surge of power ripped the fragile metal strand completely in two.

It was the Xollarian's dying effort. He slumped in a motionless, nearly liquescent heap. But that last blind blow at the Earthlings threatened to be a deadly one. The severed cable led to one of the black posts surrounding the enclosure. With the cable's parting an entire section of one of the gold-flecked barrier walls vanished. Xollar's deadly purple mists were already surging in.

SPEED was the Earthlings' only chance now. Helen was as quick to realize the danger as was Blake. Side by side they started their mad race toward where the silver archgate loomed nearly a hundred yards away.

They had covered barely half the distance when the air around them began to show a definite tinge of purple. With the appearance of the purple hue there came a strange and swiftly increasing agony, a torturing vibration that seemed to be tearing every atom in their bodies asunder.

They were within ten yards of the arch when Helen fell. Blake grabbed her up in his arms and stumbled on. There was no longer enough oxygen in the air to even breathe. Blake's lungs were on fire. Every cell in his body seemed vibrating in unbearable torment.

It was all that he could do to struggle up on the low platform. He staggered across the space and under the arch. It took the last shred of strength in his tortured body for him to lift his hand and pull the black lever down into place.

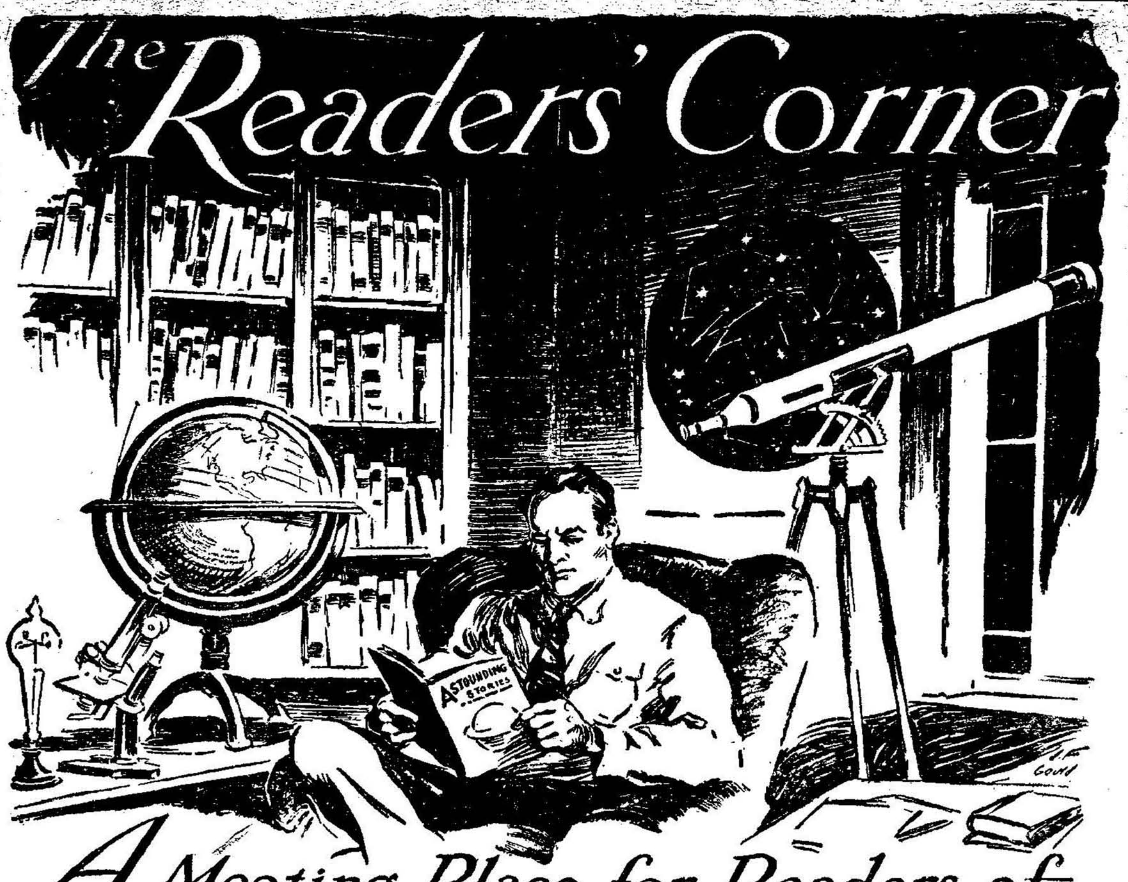
Its action was instantaneous. The agony of the purple mists was blotted out in a surging wave of mighty force that swept Blake and Helen up and away through a Spaceless universe where black chaos reigned awesomely supreme. There was a long terrible moment of hurtling through distances inconceivably vast. Blake's brain reeled in nausea.

Then suddenly all motion ceased and everything was normal again. There was firm grassy ground under his feet and a cool breeze was blowing in his face.

He opened his eyes and saw the gray half-light of early dawn. After the first swift look around him he sighed in mighty relief. To his left was the familiar skyline of Fifth Avenue. To his right was Central Park West. They were somewhere in Central Park, safe again in their own world.

And somewhere in that other world beneath the twin purple suns, the time mechanism of the silver gate should even now be releasing the explosive that would forever blot out all trace of the evil handiwork of Zehru, cosmic fisher of Xollar.

The Readers' Corner



A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

Slaps and Kisses

Dear Editor:

Here's a letter of general discussion of the many good and few bad features of Astounding Stories. I am airing the views and opinions of the small group of Science Fiction enthusiasts who form an unorganized club in this city.

I always scan "The Readers' Corner" first, and in the October issue I noticed that several fellow members have upheld my own ideas, which I will heatedly expound here and now.

Why do these horn-rimmed-spectacle-wearing, long-white-beard-stroking, bald-headed, toothless examples of [Censored. Let us have peace.—Ed.] insist upon tearing every story apart and criticising the science and possibility?

As one Reader asked, "Why do such people read A. S.?" And why does *anyone* read A. S.? If you follow the example of another Science Fiction mag and stick to strict science with no human touch, then I will follow the threat of Eugene Benefiel and reach for an automatic. If we want history we read such books as H. G. Wells' "Outline of History." If we want strict science, the market is flooded with excellent text books. But—if we want a mixture of these added to a plot that makes the Reader gasp at its apparent impossibility, a romance which after all is the entire human touch, and, finally, well written, thrilling action (such as so-and-so so haughtily trampled in his letter) then we turn to the one and only, inimitable Astounding Stories. The true spirit of a Science Fiction lover was expressed by Cam Costa in your October issue. He said, "The story is too impossible to believe, but was interesting."

What is this guy Wesso trying to do, drag the sacred name of A. S. down to the level of the art model mags? Please be a little more conservative in picturing women on your cover. Not that I object to practically nude pictures, but A. S. is just too good for that stuff. Otherwise, I admire Wesso's ability to draw lifelike human forms, which is more than Paul can do. Paul's illustrations are better from the scientific standpoint, but stick to Wesso.

Leslie Johnson's criticism was one of the few just ones. Hereafter, all fault finders should explain why they don't like such-and-such or keep their traps shut ["Traps" being an ancient Earth term for typewriters, as old John Hanson would say.—Ed.].

As for the age-old argument of reprints, I say leave the dead buried. Don't clutter up your all too few pages with musty hasbeens.

I agree with most Readers that the mag should be a semi-monthly and have smooth edges. Don't, above all, alter the size of A. S. It's perfect. One of the Readers cried that you should only allow famous Authors to contribute. Rot! If you don't give new ones a chance, what will you do when the old ones are gone?

S. Bright's request for a sense of humor among Authors applies to most everyone but Capt. S. P. Meek. If Diffin doesn't cease ending his "Brood of the Dark Moon" at such hair-raising places, I'll go crazy. "The Heads of Apex" was an unusual and interesting tale. But above all shines Starzl's "In the Orbit of Saturn," which is my idea of a perfect Science Fiction novel.—Sidney Curtiss, 1505 Argyle Rd., La Salle, Ill.

A Voice from England

Dear Editor:

I feel I must congratulate you on the success of your August number.

All the stories contain good ideas—though some may be a trifle far-fetched—and the scientific substratum underlying the stories shows deep thought on the part of the various Authors, and great selectivity on your own part. Readers will gladly excuse all else.

All things considered, I like R. F. Starzl's story, "If the Sun Died," the best of all.

This Author has the gift of introspection and a crisp brevity and clarity in expression unsurpassed anywhere. He sees right into the heart—of himself and of his characters. His scientific concepts are uniformly great, and appear very plausible the way he presents them. I do not say this latter is Starzl's greatest story, for it is not, but it is one more brain-wave from the scientific mind of a great Author.

Only this morning I received a letter from Mr. N. Filmer, the well-known orchestra conductor, acclaiming the "great ideas" of the American Science Fiction magazines—and regretting that we had no such books over here. It may be of interest to mention that he has learned that a new society has been formed near Lewisham, S. E., for the discussion of ideas embodied in the whole field of American Science Fiction.—Wm. Shore, 46 Cumberland Rd., Acton W. 3, London.

Echo—"Phooey!"

Dear Editor:

Of course I consider your mag interesting, but I would just like one thing improved upon. That is, the size of the cover. If you could see the curled edges and the deep furrows in it after the first three stories are read, you would know why.

Why people should want reprints is more than I can see. If they enjoy a certain story so gosh darn much, why don't they lay the mag away up in the attic for a couple of months and then take it down (the book, not the attic) and reread it? Why space that could contain a story with a new plot and new action should be sacrificed for a story that we all have read, is beyond my comprehension.

Also, I would like to say to Billy Stechmann that a semi-monthly and a quarterly are both good things to have around, but that a daily is not necessary, nor is it plausible. (Don't get the idea that I'm taking this dumb daily idea seriously.) And to tell C. Bessette that his letter was most rancid and ungrounded, and gave me a pain similar to a neckache. The price being a disgrace, and the covers a disgust. Phooey!

Personally, I like all the stories whether they are based on science or not, but when a sea serpent that has lived in water all his life can stay on land for two days while he keeps himself wrapped around a space ship, or when an ape's brain fits into a human's brain cavity, it is not so easy to grasp.

But since I did not think of those things when I read the respective stories, I enjoyed them immensely.

Never mind the "restructive" criticisms; A. S. is a good mag, but we want a semi-monthly!—Robert W. Blasberg, 98 Centre St., Nutley, N. J.

You Takes Your Choice

Dear Editor:

The striking cover illustration of the November Astounding Stories — that macabre skeleton—promised an unusually interesting issue, which it was indeed. I enjoyed all of the stories in that number a great deal, but I wish to comment especially on "The Planetoid of Peril," by Paul Ernst.

It seems to me that Mr. Ernst wrote that yarn with tongue in cheek. While the story was interesting enough on the surface, I found it quite amusing as a burlesque on the usual run of Science Fiction. There was the stalwart hero daring the wrath of the frightful monster singlehanded, and finally disposing of it in an absurdly simple—or simply absurd—manner just as his would-be rescuers arrive on the scene.

I know that Mr. Ernst can write with entertaining whimsicality when he chooses to, and I think he was pulling our legs in "The Planetoid of Peril." I may be wrong, but I prefer to consider the story as a humorous travesty, and as such I enjoyed it immensely.—Philip Diquot, 120 W. 175th St., Bronx, N. Y.

Wow!

Dear Editor:

When I read Mr. Carlyle Bessette's letter in the October issue of Astounding Stories it led me to believe that Mr.

Bessette should be publishing Science Fiction magazines, not criticizing them. In my opinion the text of Mr. Bessette's letter was very unfair to Astounding Stories' staff of Authors as well as its Editor. I am a Reader of Astounding Stories and I try to be a loyal one. If I did not like the stories published I most certainly would not buy the magazine.

Mr. Bessette contends that the science in Science Fiction stories should be authentic. I wonder if he realizes the handicap that an Author would be working under if he were to cling closely to scientific fact as proven by experiment. He makes it appear in his letter that this is what he believes an Author should do, and I want to assure Mr. Bessette right here that if the Authors did so I am very much afraid that Science Fiction stories would make rather dry reading.

Mr. Bessette also seems to contend that drugs which miraculously increase or diminish the human form do not so affect the clothing of objects carried by the persons being enlarged or diminished. I wonder how many times Mr. Bessette has experienced this wonderful transformation. Surely at least once, to possess such an accurate knowledge of the subject. And again, I wonder how many time-cars, as set forth in "The Exile of Time," he has built and found unsuccessful. To his accusation that "Manape the Mighty" was trash, I protest. Authors do not draw good money for writing trash. Practically all Science Fiction Authors are persons possessed of brilliant imaginations and their work is intended for people with imaginations.

I would also call the attention of Mr. Bessette to the fact that in the great majority of stories published in Astounding Stories the time of the story is clearly stated to be hundreds of years hence, and when he shouts "Impossible" in the face of these dates he is taking in a lot of territory.—John Gervais, Box 481, Burns, Oregon.

This and That

Dear Editor:

Have just finished the November issue of Astounding Stories. I think that this issue is better than the last. "Brood of the Deep Moon" turned out just as I suspected it would, only I didn't expect Doctor Dreiss to get killed. "Hawk Carse" was an excellent story, and I hope a sequel to it appears soon.

I was not much disappointed at not finding a Dr. Bird story in this issue. If Saranoff really invented or did all of the things he is credited with in these stories he would be the master mind of the world. "The Planetoid of Peril" was in my opinion an ideal story. "The Terror from the Depths" was a good Commander Hanson story.

Now, as for reprints, I don't think we would like to have a new story taken out of the magazine to put in one which we have probably read many times. At least, *I* read the stories in my magazine over a couple of times. Some of these stories need a couple of readings to enable one to grasp the full meaning.—Dale Griffith, 215 Carson St., San Antonio, Tex.

Yessir—One Man's "Boloney" Is Another Man's Meat

Dear Editor:

Have just received the November issue, and, as I read "The Readers' Corner" first, I just simply have to answer J. B. Burnholtz' letter. You see, it happens that Harl Vincent is my favorite writer of Science Fiction, and I want to say right here that "The Copper Clad World" of his was the best yarn you've ever published.

I'll agree that "The Moon Weed" was not the best thing of Harl's that you have used, but judging from the other letters in the November "Corner" and from the fact that you, as Mr. Burnholtz pointed out, thought enough of it to feature it on the cover, it surely couldn't have been as bad as our Chicago critic claims.

If Mr. Burnholtz is the dyed-in-the-wool Science Fiction Reader that he claims to be, why does he have so many pains over being able to trace the idea back to H. G. Wells? Had he so desired, he could have traced the idea of every story in that particular issue of A. S. back to H. G. Wells. And his remarks on marvelous rays might apply equally as well to 90% of all published Science Fiction yarns.

There have been some stories in recent issues that I didn't care for, personally, such as "The Devil Crystals of Arret," "Ape-Men of Xlotli" and the recent Dr. Bird stuff that Captain Meek has been turning out; but if the Editor liked them, some fans will too, and I don't have to read them or yell "Boloney!" I don't have to enjoy every story in the book to get my money's worth from A. S., and when I find one I consider "boloney" I pass it up and take the next one, which probably is "boloney" to some one else, but delightful relish to me.

If Mr. B. has read so much Science Fiction, he probably won't get much satisfaction out of Cummings' latest atom stories, for they are very much like his old ones. But new Readers of Science Fiction will get a great kick out of them.—Gayl Whitman, 11 Engine House, Main & 22nd St., Columbus, O.

Melange

Dear Editor:

It is not my custom to write to magazine Editors (Should I capitalize that?) [Yes. I did it.—Ed.] but have always greatly enjoyed the type of fiction that Jules Verne and H. G. Wells pioneered, and as I believe that the best stories of this character appear in Astounding Stories, I make free to heave a few brickbats at some "knockers" and pat a few of our Authors on the back.

Now that's a long sentence but it says just what I mean. I have read Astounding Stories quite consistently, including "The Readers' Corner," and cannot recollect ever having seen two such hardboiled comments as appeared in the "Corner" of the November issue. Talk about destructive criticism!

A communication from Carlyle Bessette states, quite without qualification that Ray Cummings' "Beyond the Vanishing Point" is the worst ever, on the basis that the science is impossible and ridiculous. If I felt that way about it I'd switch to the "Engineering News Record" or U. S. Meteorological Survey reports for amusement. Suppose it *is* impossible? Show me a Science Fiction story that hasn't got impossible elements. And besides, it's the impossibility or seeming impossibility of Science Fiction that makes it fascinating, especially when it is dressed up with the true atmosphere and absorbing story values of a master like Cummings. I liked the story.

And then there's a tirade by a Jas. B. Burnholz, who, for some obscure reason, sees fit to jump all over one of our most proficient Authors. I thought "The Moon Weed" was very interesting and worthwhile reading.

Then I saw his comments, and, sort of doubting the level of my own mentality, I dug out the old issue and skimmed through the story again. I still think it's pretty good. Of course, the alien weed idea is old, but so are the ideas of interplanetary travel, invisibility, robots, fourth dimension, time travel, etc. Wells and Verne used them long ago, but I shouldn't say they are worn out by any means. Must we condemn all of our Science Fiction of to-day as unoriginal? Certainly not. Nothing under the sun is new, but a clever Author makes it seem new by using it in a different way and surrounding it with an entirely new set of circumstances. What about rays? Wells used them, and about 90% of our modern stories use similar devices, but shall we condemn all the modern stories on this account? Of course not. Then why pick on one particular instance?

I do not make these comments in the spirit of carping criticism. I rate the Editor of A. S. as about the best in the field, and credit him with enough *sabe* to choose only those stories that merit the minimum classification of "good." My idea is rate the Authors good, better, best; rather than bad, worse, worst like some knockers do. All Readers have their individual preferences, all of which may be expected to vary widely, and if we must criticize let it be in the way of helpful suggestions rather than in the spirit of animosity.—L. F. Absolon, 20 Parkway Rd., Bronxville, N. Y.

"The Readers' Corner"

All Readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, Authors, scientific principles and possibilities — everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

Although from time to time the Editor may make a comment or so, this is a department primarily for *Readers,* and we want you to make full use of it. Likes, dislikes, criticisms, explanations, roses, brickbats, suggestions — everything's welcome here; so "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and discuss it with all of us!

—The Editor.

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INSTRUCTION BUREAU, Dept. 112, St. Louis, Mo. Send me FREE particulars "How to Qualify" for positions marked "X." Salaries, locations, opportunities, etc. *ALL SENT FREE.*

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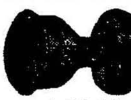

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Time counts in applying for patents. Don't risk delay in protecting your ideas. Send sketch or model for instructions or write for FREE book, "How to Obtain a Patent" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for information on how to proceed. Communications strictly confidential. Prompt, careful, efficient service. Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, 187-X Security Savings and Comm'l Bank Building (directly across street from Patent Office), Washington, D. C.

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BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21"	$2.30	$1.10
29x4.50-20"	2.40	1.15
30x4.50-21"	2.45	1.20
28x4.75-19"	2.45	1.20
30x4.95-21"	2.90	1.35
29x5.00-19"	2.95	1.35
30x5.00-20"	2.95	1.35
28x5.25-18"	2.95	1.35
29x5.25-19"	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20"	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21"	3.10	1.35
29x5.50-19"	3.20	1.35
30x5.77-20"	3.20	1.40
30x6.00-18"	3.20	1.40
31x6.00-19"	3.20	1.40
32x6.00-20"	$3.20	$1.40
33x6.00-21"	3.20	1.45
32x6.20-20"	3.65	1.75
32x6.75-20"	3.95	1.90

Reg. CORD Tires

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3	$2.20	$1.00
30x3½	2.25	1.00
31x4	2.95	1.15
32x4	2.95	1.15
33x4	2.95	1.15
32x4½	3.20	1.45
33x4½	3.20	1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.60	1.75
33x5	3.60	1.75

All Other Sizes

12 MONTHS SERVICE *Guaranteed on all tires* All Tubes New [illegible]

Send $1.00 deposit with each tire ordered. Balance C.O.D. If you send cash in full deduct **5 per cent.** You are guaranteed a year's **service or** replacement at half price. **Order Today—Save Money.**

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Kidney Inactivity Makes Many Feel Old

If Poorly Functioning Kidneys Make You Feel Old, Run-down, Nervous, or Disturb Sleep, Make Guaranteed Cystex Test

While we must all grow old in time, thousands of men and women feel older than they are, all run-down and lacking in energy because of poorly functioning Kidneys and functional bladder irritation. Other pains, such as Backache, Leg Pains, Smarting, Itching, and troubles such as Getting Up Nights, Extreme Acidity, Nervousness, Lumbago, Stiffness, Frequent Colds, Headaches, Dizziness, Circles Under the Eyes and Poor Complexion, may often be due to sluggish functioning of the Kidneys.

Younger people sometimes are affected, but there is no doubt that as we get older our Kidneys more frequently slow down in their function of filtering acid and poison-making wastes from the body. This waste material, if retained, tends to decompose and ferment, creating more and more acid and painful irritation of the bladder and passages.

Weather Affects Kidneys

If your Kidneys have a tendency to be sluggish in function, you may have noticed that you are troubled more in the fall, winter and spring. This is because the weather is more changeable and severe and because of different foods and being more shut in. Another aggravating factor is the common cold, which tends to increase acidity. If your Kidneys function poorly you should be particularly on guard during and after colds.

Right Way to Aid Kidneys

When your vitality and energy are sapped, your sleep frequently disturbed, or you suffer from other depressing conditions, caused by functional Kidney inactivity, accompanied by extreme acidity, you should have two medicines in order to get really satisfactory results. First: you need a medicine to act as a stimulant diuretic to the Kidneys, helping them in their function of filtering and purifying the blood, th[illegible] acidity. [illegible] a medici[illegible] soothes and allays sore, irritated [illegible] membranes. Then nature really [illegible] chance to restore normal functi[illegible]

E[illegible] Druggist Has Guaranteed Medicine

Fortunately for sufferers nearly [illegible] drug store now has a medi[illegible]ne so [illegible]cessful in such functional [illegible]ney conditions that it is guara[illegible] to be completely sa[illegible] or [illegible]thing. This combin[illegible] called Cystex (pron[illegible] is two different kinds o[illegible]ablets in one package. It has a record of years of almost world-wide success and possesses the necessary double action to get really satisfactory results.

Cystex Praised by Druggists

Druggists are high in their praise of Cystex, because it is proving a blessing to so many of their customers. For instance, E. H. Tum, widely known druggist of Bucyrus, Ohio, recently said: "I consider the Cystex formula very good. One of my customers, who is 75 years old, told me that for 15 years he was bothered with Getting Up Nights but after taking Cystex he is in wonderful condition and sleeps well."

Druggists everywhere express opinion similar to that of Mr. A. R. Otis, Kendalville, Ind., 40 years a druggist, who says: "I have been selling Cystex for a number of years with very gratifying results. A great many customers tell us of the extreme benefit they receive. Being familiar with the ingredients of Cystex, I would say there is no question but what it will do 9 people out of 10 good."

Thousands of druggists have had the same experience as J. C. Shutz, a successful druggist in Madison, S. Dak., who says: "I have handled Cystex for three years and have guaranteed satisfaction or money returned with every sale. In all this time no one has yet asked for any money returned, which proves that Cystex works satisfactorily."

Ask your druggist — the man [illegible] knows medicines. He can tell [illegible] that Cystex does not contain any dope or habit-forming drugs, but only [illegible] purest of highly beneficial ingredients.

[illegible]ks in 15 Minutes

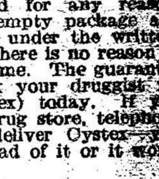
[illegible] fine thing about Cystex th[illegible] should please you is that it works so fast it starts circulating through the system in [illegible]n 11 to 15 minutes. Because of this fast action sufferers report that there is no long waiting for results, and the great benefit often begins within [illegible] to 48 hours or so.

Guaranteed 8 Day Test

You don't have to risk a penny to see for yourself the great good that Cystex can do. Just ask your druggist for a package. Put it to the test for 8 days. See for yourself how fast and positively it works. If it makes you feel younger, stronger, sleep [illegible] and really able to enjoy life by combating these functional Bladder and Kidney conditions, the small cost will be a wonderful investment, but if not completely satisfied for any reason merely return the empty package and get your 75c back under the written legal guarantee. There is no reason to hesitate or waste time. The guarantee protects you. Ask your druggist for Cystex (say Siss-tex) today. If you can't go to your drug store, telephone and ask him to deliver Cystex—you are bound to be glad of it or it won't cost you a penny.

Guaranteed Trial Coupon

This coupon is your Guarantee on a full-sized, Eight-Day Treatment of Cystex. It is specifically understood and agreed that you are to be the sole judge and must be completely satisfied, or you merely return empty package and get your money back. The manufacturer protects the druggist. Clip this coupon now as a reminder to get Cystex today.



Missing Page: Inside Back Cover

If you own this magazine, and would like to contribute, please email us the image (in .JPEG format at 300 dpi) to:

info@pulpmags.org

NATURALLY *FRESH*

never parched, never toasted!

The cool, flavorful *freshness* of Camel cigarettes is purely a natural product.

It is attained not by any mysterious processes, but simply by preserving the full natural goodness of fine sun-ripened tobaccos.

These choice tobaccos of which Camels are blended—fine Turkish and mild Domestic tobaccos—are never parched or toasted.

On the contrary we exercise every care and precaution to safeguard the natural moisture which is infused with their mildness and flavor.

That's why the Camel Humidor Pack is such a boon to Camel smokers—it could do little or nothing except for the fact that the cigarettes we put into it are fresh to start with.

To see what that means in cool, smooth, throat-friendly smoking pleasure, switch to *fresh* Camels for just one day—then leave them, if you can!

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PRINCE ALBERT QUARTER HOUR, Alice Joy, "Old Hunch," and Prince Albert Orchestra, direction Paul Van Loan, every night except Sunday, N. B. C. Red Network

See radio page of local newspaper for time

Smoke a
FRESH
cigarette
CAMEL
TURKISH & DOMESTIC BLEND CIGARETTES
CAMEL 20's
CHOICE QUALITY
Smoke a fresh cigarette
CAMEL HUMIDOR PACK

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● *Don't remove the moisture-proof wrapping from your package of Camels after you open it. The Camel Humidor Pack is protection against perfume and powder odors, dust and germs. In offices and homes, even in the dry atmosphere of artificial heat, the Camel Humidor Pack delivers fresh Camels and keeps them right until the last one has been smoked*

CAMELS

***Made* FRESH – *Kept* FRESH**